

**THE INVISIBILITY OF THE CHURCH  
FOR LUTHER AND CALVIN**

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**by  
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## INTRODUCTION

The theme of this study is the invisibility of the church as conceived by Luther and Calvin. In pursuing it, the aim has been twofold: to make clear the thought of the two Reformers, and to discover whether the current distinction between the visible and invisible church derives from them. The first has its importance for ecclesiology, the second for participation in the life of the congregation today.

The method chosen has been a chronological exposition of the idea first in Luther and then in Calvin; followed by an analysis and evaluation in which some comparisons are made. A review of interpretations from the time of Ritschl up to the present has been appended.



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## PART ONE

### THE INVISIBILITY OF THE CHURCH FOR LUTHER

#### I. BEFORE THE BREAK WITH ROME

It was as Professor of Theology at Wittenberg, that Luther first began to discuss openly the nature of the Church. And it was in his expository lectures on the Psalms, Ps.103(104)<sup>23</sup>, that he first described the Church as invisible. The Church, he said, is invisible, and intelligible through faith (Invisibilis, intelligibilis per fidem est Ecclesia).<sup>1</sup> The statement occurs in a discussion of the works of God. The agents of God in the world are the Apostles, Prophets and doctors, and the word of God (verbum Dei) is his instrument. The context thus brings the term invisibilis, as applied to the Church, into relation with the word of God. Previously to this he had referred to the structure (structura) of the Church as inward and invisible before God (intus coram deo invisibilis).<sup>2</sup> And he had added that the works and activities of Christ's Church (opera et factura Christi ecclesiae) are not perceived with the naked eye, but with spiritual eyes in understanding and faith (non oculis carnalibus, sed spiritualibus in intellectu et fide cognoscuntur).<sup>3</sup>

The explanatory words for invisibilis are, therefore,

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Weimar, 1883 ff, 4,189

<sup>2</sup> LW 4,81

<sup>3</sup> LW 4,81

intelligibilis per fidem, and in intellectu et fide. They refer to Luther's conviction that true knowledge of God is received only by faith; and that this necessarily runs contrary to the wisdom of this world. It is this fact that makes the object of fideist knowledge invisible to the world's eyes. For example, in commenting on the superscription of Ps. 74<sup>1</sup>, he said that understanding (intellectus) refers to invisible and spiritual realities (invisibilia, spiritualia) which cannot be seen but can be reached only by understanding and by faith. Thus scriptural "understanding" is different from philosophical; for philosophy speaks always of things visible and apparent (visibilibus et apparentibus), while faith is not of things apparent, nor is it deduced from them, but is from Heaven.<sup>1</sup>

The fideist way to true knowledge, or eruditio, is more exactly characterised as after the spirit and sense of Christ (secundum spiritum et sensum Christi).<sup>2</sup> And this means the wisdom of the Cross (sapientia crucis Christi).<sup>3</sup> The substance, as it were, of the divine invisible realities (invisibilia, divina et celestia) is the Son of God "incarnate and crucified and dead and raised for our salvation".<sup>4</sup> He found scriptural support for his use of the term invisibilia in Romans 1<sup>20</sup>, "the invisible things (invisibilia) of God are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood by the things that are made (operibus

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<sup>1</sup> LW 3,507-8

<sup>3</sup> LW 3,176

<sup>2</sup> LW 3,171-2

<sup>4</sup> LW 3,176

intellecta).<sup>1</sup> One of the verses which has been often used to justify a natural theology is here used for quite the opposite purpose.

The Church in this sense is invisible because created by God and formed out of Christ. It is built on the rock which is Christ incarnate (Sicut Christus secundum carnem dicitur petra, super quam edificata est Ecclesia).<sup>2</sup> Its nature and form, therefore, are bound up with his. The Church has the invisibilia of Christ mediated to it by the "word of God". A gloss on meum testamentum reads "the word of God (verbum dei) by which we receive testimony of future and invisible things (de futuris et invisibilibus)".<sup>3</sup> Again, the word or the law of the Gospel (lex Euangelii), is said to be perceived only by the true understanding (intellectu), because it alone makes accessible the invisible realities (invisibilia).<sup>4</sup> Hence, the Church may also be said to be built on the Gospel (in verbo Euangelii est Ecclesia constructa).<sup>5</sup>

Luther considered the Scriptures as ranking with the Sacraments as a gateway to the understanding and apprehension of the Gospel. In commenting on "gates" (portae) in Ps. 147<sup>13</sup>, he found that these are, in the first place, the understanding of the Scriptures (intelligentia scripturarum), and, secondly, the Sacraments, chiefly, of baptism and penance (poenitentia).<sup>6</sup> He did not explicitly replace

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<sup>1</sup> LW 3,230

<sup>4</sup> LW 4,285

<sup>2</sup> LW 3,386

<sup>5</sup> LW 4,189

<sup>3</sup> LW 3,279; 4,11

<sup>6</sup> LW 4,456

the Sacraments by the word of Scripture, but it is more his concern than the Sacraments. He also assumed that the Gospel is to be proclaimed by the priesthood of the Church. In Ps.30<sup>10</sup>, soul (anima) signifies allegorically the priestly order dispensing the Sacraments and preaching the word (ordo administratorum in sacramentis et verbo dei). These bring life to the Church as the soul does to the body.<sup>1</sup> The Church as an invisible reality is, thus, in effect bound to the existing structure of Rome. And yet there are occasional signs that the connection is not a necessary one. The doctrine of the general priesthood of believers is foreshadowed when all believers are described as priests and kings through Christ (omnes fideles per Christum sacerdotem sunt sacerdotes et reges).<sup>2</sup> Already at this time, Luther had realised that the word produces fruit, wherever it is preached and heard. And he had seen the significance of Isaiah 55<sup>11</sup> as a basis in Scripture for his belief. Quia ubicunque predicatur verbum spiritus, sine fructu non predicatur. Hence it follows that the word must be freely heard (verbum dei libenter audiendum est). Since it is never preached in vain: Isaiah 55. Verbum, quod egrediatur de ore meo, non etc.<sup>3</sup>

Other adjectives descriptive of the Church recur throughout the commentary, and indicate the sense in which Luther applied the word invisibilis to the Church. One that is used more frequently is that the Church is "hidden" (abscondita). The Church is hidden because its members live

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<sup>1</sup> LW 3,170

<sup>2</sup> LW 4,224

<sup>3</sup> LW 3,258-9



by faith and the Spirit (in fide et spiritu) in the knowledge and love of the invisible realities (invisibilia). But worldly men (carnales) who live by the world and the flesh (in re ... et ... in carne) are not hidden but manifest, being involved in visible things (non sunt in abscondito, sed in manifesto, voluntur in rebus visibilibus).<sup>1</sup> Another synonym for abscondita is occulta. Just as the Spirit is hidden (occultus), so in this life is the Church hidden (occulta). But the flesh and the world are manifest (caro est manifesta ... Mundus in manifesto).<sup>2</sup>

The invisibility or hiddenness of the Church in the world means that it is veiled in ignominy, shame, weakness, and humility (ignominia, infirmitas, humilitas, abiectio).<sup>3</sup> But this is only in appearance. In the eyes of God the Church shines in true splendour. Ecclesia est coram deo ... gloria et decor, sed coram mundo <sup>o</sup>approbrium hominum et abiectio plebis.<sup>4</sup> Between the Church and the world a gulf is fixed. They are in irreconcilable conflict. Hence the Church dwells in the midst of enemies (in media inimicorum).<sup>5</sup>

Another fact that makes for the invisibility of the Church is that its bounds are not defined. It is diffused throughout the whole world (diffusa ... Ecclesia per totum mundum).<sup>6</sup> Its unity does not consist in any visible institution, but in the spiritual bond of faith, hope, and love. Est autem concilium iustorum sive spiritualis conventus

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<sup>1</sup> LW 3,150

<sup>2</sup> LW 3,203

<sup>3</sup> LW 4,451

<sup>4</sup> LW 4,242

<sup>5</sup> LW 4,189

<sup>6</sup> LW 4,189

fidelium idem sensus fidei, spei et charitatis: licet sint loco et tempore distantes, charitate tamen et fide sunt in unum.<sup>1</sup>

The members of the Church as a spiritual community (spiritualis conventus) are, nevertheless, plainly visible according to the flesh (secundum carnem). Luther made an elaborate allegory of Ps. 32<sup>7(6)</sup> where the Psalmist speaks of the waters (aquae) and the floods (abyssi). The waters represent the members of the Church according to the flesh (secundum corpus) and the floods are these members invisibly (que videri nequeunt) placed in hiddenness (occultis, absconditis). That is, the members of the Church are invisible as they share in the mysteries of faith and the Sacraments of the Church (mysteria fidei et sacramenta Ecclesie).<sup>2</sup> From the one point of view the Church is visible in a definite place, but from the other the members of the Church are concealed in the hiddenness of faith (in thesauris, ... occultis, ... invisibilibus). The mysteries here can not be seen, but must be believed (que nullus hominum videre potest, credere autem potest).<sup>3</sup> There is nothing here that could not be found in the traditional piety of the earnest inheritor of mediaeval catholicism, but there is a clearer emphasis on the cruciality of faith for membership in the Church, and on the uselessness of a mere outward conformity. The believer is the true member: many adhere outwardly, but true adherence is a matter of the heart of man. Quia non

<sup>1</sup> LW 4,239-40

<sup>2</sup> LW 3,183 f

<sup>3</sup> LW 3,184

potest adherere Ecclesie nisi fidelis,.... Ideo adherent ei multi secundum corpus et exteriorem hominem, sed vera adherentia non est nisi cordium, in qua non nisi rectum cor herere potest.<sup>1</sup> Inevitably there comes about a sharp separation between the mass of outward adherents and the true believers. The former remain in unbelief, the latter cleave to the Gospel. As Holl has pointed out, Luther saw the Word as cutting through the Church and separating the one group from the other. Alii cadunt incredulitate, alii surgunt fide.<sup>2</sup> These form a double "generation" (generatio) in the Church of carneles and spirituales.<sup>3</sup> Hence the Church forms a complex analogy to the believer in Romans 6. The individual is spiritual<sup>and</sup> hidden before God (homo spiritualis et interior coram Deo). This is the new man. The old man is a man of sin and of the flesh outwardly before the world (homo peccati, homo carnalis et exterior coram mundo).<sup>4</sup> But the Church is divided, as it were, not only vertically but horizontally. The line of the Gospel runs vertically through every believer, and horizontally between the believers and the unbelievers.

Luther eschewed the heretical attempt to form a pure society of saints. He took the conjunction of the "assembly of the just" (concilium iustorum) and the "congregation" (congregatio) in Ps.110(111)<sup>1</sup> as proof that the former can

<sup>1</sup> LW 4,136-7

<sup>2</sup> LW 4,248; See Holl, "Die Entstehung von Luthers Kirchenbegriff," in Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte I. Luther, Tübingen, JCB Mohr, 1923, 293

<sup>3</sup> LW 4,187

<sup>4</sup> LW 3,182



only have its existence within the later. The heretics want only the former and not the latter. But the assembly of the just cannot exist except in the "congregation" where the unrighteous are found (ubi mixti sunt mali). Hence there should be no desertion of the congregation because not all are in the assembly of the just.<sup>1</sup> The Church of real believers is inseparable from the outward form of the Church, but it is clearly the reality underlying and giving meaning to the whole.

This reality he described in current mediaeval-Augustinian terminology: the Church as a body (corpus) and as a communion (communio). The Church is the mystical body which fills the whole earth (corpus ... mysticum, quod nunc ... totam terram replevit).<sup>2</sup> The Church and the Gospel are the natural and mystical body of Christ (corpus eius naturale et mysticum, quod est Ecclesia et Evangelium).<sup>3</sup> The Church is the body of believers (corpus fidelium) and the body of the saints (corpus sanctorum).<sup>4</sup> The Church (ecclesia) is called also a living body in which all share in all things (vivum corpus, in quo participant omnes omnibus).<sup>5</sup> Here is foreshadowed Luther's later development of the conception of the Church as a communion (communio). Indeed, in the gloss appended to the comment are the words "whence the communion of saints" (Inde communio sanctorum).<sup>6</sup> Earlier, in expounding Ps. 30(31)<sup>13</sup> in his usual allegorical way, he mentioned the communion of saints

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<sup>1</sup> LW 4,240

<sup>2</sup> LW 4,190

<sup>3</sup> LW 4,42

<sup>4</sup> LW 4,191

<sup>5</sup> LW 4,289

<sup>6</sup> LW 4,289

(communio sanctorum) who are of one heart in the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

According to Karl Holl, who first discovered a departure from the traditional conception of the church in Luther's Commentary on the Psalms, Luther presented a rounded and finished conception of the Church, the one he held to all his life.<sup>2</sup> This is an exaggeration. For the temptation must be guarded against, first, of proving too much from a gathering together of isolated phrases and citations; and, second, of forgetting that these are but a few evangelical grains in a heap of scholastic-allegorical chaff. Kohlmeyer, more temperately, recognises that much of the thought is in the common Augustinian-Scholastic tradition.<sup>3</sup> There are also traces of mysticism.<sup>4</sup> Luther stood confidently on traditional catholic ground. The description of the Church as invisible and the whole context in which the term is used stem from the mediaeval Neo-Platonic-Christian heritage.<sup>5</sup> But one thing has changed. The Church, described as invisible, is conceived of as a living reality deriving from the Word which testifies to Christ. The terminology is undoubtedly traceable to the Occamist teaching of Biel;<sup>6</sup> but it is the salvation which springs from the apprehension of the Word, against the evidence of human wisdom, and authenticated in personal experience, that ultimately placed the Church for Luther in the category of "invisible".

<sup>1</sup> LW 3,169

<sup>2</sup> Holl, op. cit., 298-9

<sup>3</sup> Kohlmeyer, "Die Bedeutung der Kirche für Luther", in Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte, Vol.47, No 4(1928), 470

<sup>4</sup> Jundt, Le Developpement de la Pensée Religieuse de Luther jusqu'en 1517, Paris, Fischbacher, 1906, 229-33

<sup>5</sup> Kohlmeyer, op. cit., 479

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 470-1

## II. THE BREAK WITH ROME

In the years 1517-20, when Luther came into conflict with the ecclesiastical authority of the day, his conception of the Church emerged as a historical force. The protagonists of that authority asserted the church's absolute structural visibility. Prieras, thus, claimed that the Roman Church was virtually the universal church, and that the Pope was virtually the Roman Church (ecclesia ... universalis virtualiter est ecclesia Romana: ecclesia Romana ... virtualiter ... est Pontifex Summus).<sup>1</sup> Luther replied by asserting the absolute invisibility of the ultimate ecclesiastical authority. Christ himself, not the Pope, was virtually the church (Ego ecclesiam virtualiter non scio nisi in Christo).<sup>2</sup> The visible structure of the Church of Rome became for him only of relative, historical validity. Christ was the Head of the universal church (ecclesia universalis), which included not only the Roman Church, but also the Greek.<sup>3</sup> Otherwise, the thousands of saints and martyrs in that Church would have to be excluded from the true church (tot milia martyrum et sanctorum per annos mille et quadringentos

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<sup>1</sup> Dialogus, 1518, quoted in LW 1,656, n.1

<sup>2</sup> Ad dialogum Silvestri Prieratis de Potestate Pape responsis, 1518, in LW 1,656

<sup>3</sup> Resolutio Lutheriana super propositione XIII. de potestate Papae, 1519, in LW 2,239

in greca ecclesia habitos extra ecclesiam eiicere).<sup>1</sup> Being without Roman rule (imperium), they must be outside the church itself.<sup>2</sup> Before the time of Gregory I., Luther claimed, the Roman Church had no priority over other churches.<sup>3</sup> He proved this from exposing the claims of the Papal decretals, by arguments drawn from Scripture, from church history over a thousand years, and from the decrees of the Nicene Council.<sup>4</sup> In all this his critique was similar to that of the Conciliarists of the preceding century.<sup>5</sup>

The conviction that the visible structure of Rome possessed if not divine, at least some historical validity he abandoned when he became convinced that the solidification of the church into an external institutional structure was the work of Antichrist.<sup>6</sup> But only slowly and reluctantly did he realise this. In the 7<sup>th</sup> Indulgence Thesis, he had said that God does not remit the guilt of sin unless the sinner humbly submits to the priest in all things (nulli prorsus remittit deus culpam quin simul eum subiiciat humiliatum in omnibus sacerdoti suo vicario).<sup>7</sup> The following year he asked

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<sup>1</sup> Disputatio I. Eccii et M. Lutheri Lipsiae habita, 1519, in LW 2,276

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 277

<sup>3</sup> Revoluciones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute, 1518, in LW 1,571

<sup>4</sup> Resolutio Lutheriana, 1519, in LW 2,185

<sup>5</sup> R. Seeberg, Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte, Leipzig, A. Deichert, 1917, 4-1, 281

<sup>6</sup> See Boehmer, Road to Reformation, trans. Doppelstein & Tappert, Philadelphia, Muhlenberg Press, 1946, 275-6

<sup>7</sup> Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum, 1517, in LW 1,233

for homage to the Pope almost as if to God himself (Quia auctoritati papali in omnibus cum reverentia cedendum est. Qui enim potestati resistit, resistit dei ordinationi, qui autem deo resistunt, ipsi sibi damnationem acquirunt).<sup>1</sup> In 1519, he again denied that one should separate from Rome. The demands of love and unity must always outweigh the Church's evils.

Das die Romische kirche von gott fur allen andern geeret sey, ist keyn zweyfell. ...Ob nu leyder es zu Rom also steht, das woll beszer tuchte, szo ist doch die und keyn ursach szo grosz, noch werden mag, das man sich von der selben kirchen reyszen adder scheyden soll. Ja yhe ubeler es do zugeht, yhe mehr man zulauffen und anhangen soll, dann durch abreyszen adder vorachten wirt es nit beszer. ... Es ist eyne schlechte liebe unnd gynckeyt, die sich leszt frembde sunde tzurteylen.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, he was developing his conception of the church which was making this position untenable. The church was ruled and maintained by its invisible Head, Christ. Hence it was a Kingdom of Faith (regnum fidei), because the King is not seen but believed (non videtur, sed creditur). The Papists made a kingdom of visible things (regnum rerum praesentium), since they set up a visible head (visibile caput).<sup>3</sup> The church's treasure (thesaurus), as Luther put<sup>it</sup> in Indulgence Thesis 62, is the sacrosanct Gospel of the glory and grace of God (sacrosanctum Euangelium gloriae et gratiae dei).<sup>4</sup> Hence, wherever the Word of

<sup>1</sup> Resolutiones disputationum, 1518, LW 1,618

<sup>2</sup> Unterricht auf etliche Artikel, etc., 1519, LW 2,72-3

<sup>3</sup> Resolutio Lutheriana, 1519, in LW 2,239

<sup>4</sup> LW 1,616



God is preached and believed, there is the church, and where the church is, there is the Bride of Christ (ubicunque prae-dicatur verbum dei et creditur, ... ibi ecclesia: ubi eccle-sia, ibi sponsa Christi).<sup>1</sup> Thus, faith brings with it all things - the Keys, the sacraments and ecclesiastical author-ity (claves, sacramenta, potestatem).<sup>2</sup> This was at last the position to which Luther held all his life. Faith is perhaps stressed more here than later. But he openly set the Word in a place of centrality, and thereby displaced the sacrament from its traditional role. It is better to do without the sacrament than the Word. The former can be dispensed with, the latter is indispensable (Melius est enim omittere sacra-mentum quam euangelium non nunciare).<sup>3</sup> The Word or the Gos-pel is thought of in dynamic terms. It is the real living means of salvation. It is part of Luther's nominalist thought world,<sup>4</sup> and it is also rooted in the theologia crucis. It was the latter that underlay his praise, in the Indulgence Theses,<sup>5</sup> of the prophets who cry the cross, the cross, when there is no cross; and which led him, the following year, to argue that in Christ crucified is the right theology and knowledge of God (in Christo crucifixo est vera Theologia et cognitio Dei).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Resolutio Lutheriana, 1519, in LW 2, 208

<sup>2</sup> Idem.

<sup>3</sup> Resolutiones disputationum, 1518, in LW 1, 604

<sup>4</sup> E. Seeberg, Luthers Theologie II, Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer, 1937, 440

<sup>5</sup> Thesis 93

<sup>6</sup> Disputatio Heidelbergae habita, 1518, in LW 1, 361-2

The church which is formed by the Word must be its creature not its master. Hence the visible structure of the Church can only be relative to it (concilium vero creatura ... verbi).<sup>1</sup> For Christ has set and founded his church, not on external power and authority, or on temporal things, but on inner love, humility and unity (Christus seyne kirche nit auff euszerliche scheynbare gewalt unnd ubirkeyt adder eyninge zeitliche dingk, ... sunder yn die ynwendige lieb, demut unnd eynickeit gesetzt und gegrundet hat).<sup>2</sup> This inner love and unity, as Gottschick shows, and as the context of Luther's thought reveals, is not to be taken in a simple ethical sense. The words are similar to Hus's, but Luther related them more centrally to the Gospel than did Hus and the Pre-reformers.<sup>3</sup>

Luther found that the church as the creature of the Word was being obstructed by the visible structure of Rome. In particular, its ecclesiastical laws had come to supplant God's law and Gospel (eyn grosze vorkerunge itzt in der welt ist, das man gottis gepot gantz vorachtet, Und die weyl sich mit menschlichen rechten und wercken deckt, unnd nu dem Pabst und seyne wort weyt mehr furcht dan got und gottis wort).<sup>4</sup> He therefore demanded a new type of freedom in the visible structure corresponding with the nature of the Gospel. Wher-

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<sup>1</sup> Disputatio I. Eccii et M. Lutheri Lipsiae habita, 1519, in LW 2,288

<sup>2</sup> Unterricht auf etliche Artikel, 1519, in LW 2,73

<sup>3</sup> Gottschick, "Hus", Luthers und Zwinglis Lehre von der Kirche, in Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte VIII, (1886), No 4,552

<sup>4</sup> Unterricht, 1519, in LW 2,71

ever the revelation of God and the confession of Christ, there also the Keys. And these may be found in any church, and not in some particular one only, where it is entrusted to a certain special individual (At haec in qualibet ecclesia est, non autem in ullo uno singulari et in certo homine).<sup>1</sup> It follows that iure divino, whatever the Church of Rome has any church (ecclesia) has, however small.<sup>2</sup> The implications of this thought lead towards denominationalism. Luther, however, thought only in terms of a unitary Christendom.

In these earlier controversial writings, Luther did not devote much thought to the re-construction in detail of the conception of the church. In Resolution 37 is the idea of communio, that the Christian participates in all the goods of Christ and the church (Christianus ... habet participationem omnium bonorum Christi et Ecclesiae).<sup>3</sup> The following year, commenting on the 58<sup>th</sup> Thesis regarding the treasury of merits, he argues for an intra-mundane communio sanctorum, where each works for the other (pro altero laborat).<sup>4</sup>

Before the Disputation with Eck at Leipzig, Luther came on the idea that in the Creed, communio sanctorum was a simple gloss upon the preceding ecclesia sancta.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Resolutio Lutheriana, 1519, in LW 2,191

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 208

<sup>3</sup> LW 1,593

<sup>4</sup> LW 1,607-8

<sup>5</sup> See Kattenbusch, "Die Doppelschichtigkeit in Luthers Kirchenbegriff", in Theologische Studien und Kritiken, Lutherana V, 1928, 225-6



He was arguing, as many times before, that the church is basically of Christ, and not fastened to a visible Petrine succession. It is the communion of saints; not a group of prelates. (Symbolum stat firmiter "Credo ecclesiam sanctam, communionem sanctorum," Non, ut nunc aliqui somniant, "Credo ecclesiam sanctam esse praelatum" vel aliud quod fingunt. Totus mundus confitetur, sese credere ecclesiam sanctam Catholicam aliud nihil esse quam communionem sanctorum).<sup>1</sup> All he understood by this term he read into Hus's article of faith (Credo in ... sanctam ecclesiam catholicam, sanctorum communionem).<sup>2</sup> And at the Disputation with Eck, he called many of Hus's condemned articles most Christian and evangelical (Christianissimi et Evangelici).<sup>3</sup> Eck exploited Luther's sympathy with the "heretic", and yet the relation was not close between them. Luther had found his own way indepen<sup>den</sup>tly of Hus; though he was also influenced by Augustine, and in opposition to the Papacy.<sup>4</sup> The next year, however, when he looked into Hus's de Ecclesia, he exclaimed to Spalatin that they were all Hussites without knowing it (sumus omnes Hussitae ignorantes).<sup>5</sup> Up till then, he had steadfastly condemned the Bohemians as schismatics for failing to preserve the bond of love so as to keep the unity of the church, (Boemorum discidium a

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<sup>1</sup> Resolutio Lutheriana, 1519, in LW 2,190

<sup>2</sup> Disputatio Eccii et M. Lutheri, 1519, in LW 2,279

<sup>3</sup> LW 2,279

<sup>4</sup> Gottschick, op cit, 545-7

<sup>5</sup> LW (Briefe) 2,42

Rhōmana ecclesia nulla possit excusatione defendi ...).<sup>1</sup>

During the years 1518-20, Luther began to consider as a pressing issue, the relation between the church of the invisible Christ, and the existing structure of the Papacy. He was threatened with excommunication. What was meant, at such a time, by the Cyprianic dictum extra ecclesiam nulla salus? Did the reality of the church at times lie apart from the institutional fabric? And if so, what was its relation to it? The Sermo de excommunicatione<sup>e</sup> of 1518 is an attempt to answer these questions in an actual historical and personal situation. What emerges is the first clear distinction between the invisibility and the visibility of the church.

The Communion of the Faithful (communio fidelium) was, he said, twofold (duplex). The one was inner and spiritual (interna et spiritualis), and the other external and corporal (externa et corporalis). The first was a communion of faith, hope and love in God. The second was the participation in the sacraments, or signs of faith, hope and love; which extended to a communion in customs and what went with outward association (quae ... extenditur usque ad communionem rerum, usus, colloqui, habitationis aliarumque corporalium conversationum).<sup>2</sup> Excommunication consists in being placed outside the second communion. For, from the communio spiritualis a person may fall away only by his own sins, and to it

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<sup>1</sup> In epistolam Pauli ad Galatas commentarius, 1519, in LW 2, 605

<sup>2</sup> LW 1, 639

he can be admitted only by God himself. He has nothing to fear from an excommunication by the visible ecclesiastical authority,<sup>1</sup> nor from deprivation of the Eucharist and a Christian burial. If faith, hope and love remain, there also are the true communio and the real goods of the church. By faith, hope and love, Luther was thinking in terms of the Gospel, rather than of law and ethics.

The relation between the two sides of the communio duplex is not described more exactly. It would seem that the corporalis communio participates in and mediates the living reality of the spiritualis communio or community of the Spirit. But the latter is in no sense confined to the bounds of the former. Thus we are at the source of the visible-invisible church distinction. It is to be found in Luther himself, and cannot be attributed to any Calvinist importation.<sup>2</sup>

We may not conclude from this distinction, however, that the church as a communio spiritualis is pure inwardness. The excommunicated have the certainty of their baptism, and also the presence of the Word. They are deprived only of the external administration of the Eucharist. The sacraments remain essential for the believer. But this was not the point Luther was then concerned to make.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> LW 1,643

<sup>2</sup> See Köhler, "Zu Luthers Kirchenbegriff", in Die Christliche Welt, 1907, 375-6

<sup>3</sup> See Gottschick, op cit, 559-60; and E. Rietschel, Das Problem der unsichtbar-sichtbaren Kirche bei Luther, Leipzig, Heinsius, 1932, 39

The distinction between the two communions was worked out the following year on the analogy of the sacrament, in Ein Sermon vom Sakrament des Leichnams Christi und von den Brüderschaften. And here it is plain that the two sides are indissolubly bound together. The communion of Christ and the saints (die lieb und gemeynschafft Christi und aller heyligen) is hidden, invisible and spiritual (verborgen, unsichtlich und geystlich). Only a bodily, visible and external sign of it appears (eyn leyblich, sichtlich, eusserlich zeychen). For if the invisible communion were openly apparent, as in a natural human community (der menschen zeytlich gemeynschafft), then we would put our trust in transient things (zeytlich sichtliche guter), rather than in eternal things (unsichtlichen und ewigen guter).<sup>1</sup>

The visible open community is thus a sign of the invisible reality. The church is not constituted by its visible structure, and any reduction to this results in men having the empty shell of zeytlich sichtliche guter. This had in fact happened in the case of Rome. To offset Rome's extreme visibility, he brought out the real nature of the church as a communion of Christ and the saints (Christi und aller heyligen). The expression Christus und alle heyligen is used repeatedly throughout the sermon.<sup>2</sup> They constitute a spiritual body (geystlicher corper), which we enter through communion and incorporation (gemeynschafft und eyn leybung).<sup>3</sup> In one place he referred to Christ in heaven

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<sup>1</sup> LW 2,752-3

<sup>2</sup> LW 2,742-54 passim

<sup>3</sup> LW 2,743

with the angels and saints, which suggests the traditional idea of the communion of saints in heaven.<sup>1</sup> But elsewhere he spoke of our incorporation in the community of Christ (gemeyn Christi) as if it were a reality on earth and within history.<sup>2</sup>

The sacrament itself is made into a means whose end and significance is communion (gemeynschafft) with Christ. And he used the analogy of the corporate mediaeval town to make clear the independence of the church's members.<sup>3</sup> He then went on to describe in more detail the character of the communio with Christ. If one member is afflicted, Christ and the saints are afflicted too.<sup>4</sup> If he sins, they intercede lest his sin be reckoned according to the strict judgement of God.<sup>5</sup> Just as when a burgher is in trouble the others rally round and help, so a Christian in trouble finds help in the whole community of the spiritual body.<sup>6</sup> He can thus go happily to the sacrament, but in turn finds himself a part of the communion (gemeynschafft) and shares its burdens.<sup>7</sup>

Like the sacramental elements, he becomes transubstantiated (vorwandelt) and drawn into the community of Christ and all the saints.<sup>8</sup>

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1 LW 2,745

2 LW 2,752 and passim

3 LW 2,743

4 LW 2,744

5 Idem

6 LW 2,743-745

7 LW 2,745

8 LW 2,749

In the face of this view of the real character of Christian community, which Luther never abandoned, he cannot be lightly charged with individualism. Nor is it a plea for a holy closed shop (Bruderschaft) where a small group piously cultivates its inwardness. It is rather, as Althaus shows, the recovery of an almost allimportant element in the New Testament understanding of the church.<sup>1</sup> The recovery was due in no small measure to the experience of support and encouragement which Luther himself received during the crucial days of conflict.<sup>2</sup> He coveted the experience of communio for the whole church, not just for himself, or for a Bruderschaft.<sup>3</sup> Here was the reality of the church of which ecclesiastical authority could not deprive a person. Rade has suggested that Luther intended this pure "Liebescommunismus" to be realised in the individual congregations, but that this did not happen.<sup>4</sup> It does seem that Luther's view was largely that of the man who breaks through the old patterns with a new vision. To realise concretely that vision demanded also the different quality of the organiser.

Another question is the validity of his analogy of

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<sup>1</sup> Althaus, Communio Sanctorum, Munich, Chr. Kaiser, 1929, 1 ff

<sup>2</sup> See Strohl, L'Epanouissement de la Pensée religieuse de Luther, 1515-20, Strasbourg, Librairie Istra, 1924, 314-5

<sup>3</sup> LW 2,756-7

<sup>4</sup> "Der Sprung in Luthers Kirchenbegriff", in Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, 1914, 250



the invisibility and visibility of the church with the reality and sign of the sacrament. It may be that this has led to confusion as well as to an advance over the juridically ordered structure of Rome.

The next year, 1520, Luther returned to the definition of the relation of the invisible and visible sides of the church, in the light of his reinterpretation of the sacrament in terms of communio. His subject was excommunication, as two years before. His description of the unsichtlich gemeynschafft and the sichtlich gemeynschafft is yet more exact. The communion of the church (gemeynschafft) is twofold (zweyerley), just as in the sacrament there are two things: the sign and its significance. The first gemeynschafft is inner spiritual and invisible (ynnerlich, geystlich, unsichtlich), and it includes those incorporated through faith, hope and love into the communion of Christ and the saints. This communion is the significance, the work and the power underlying the sacrament. It may be entered only by the will of God, and it is forsaken only through unbelief or sin. Over it no one has any control whatever.<sup>1</sup>

The other community (gemeynschafft) is external, bodily and visible (euszerlich, leyplich, unnd sichtlich). It consists of all who share externally in the sacraments. In this community the Pope has the right of admitting or excluding men from membership.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eyn Serman von dem Bann, 1520, in LW 6,64

<sup>2</sup> Idem

In the differentiation of the two sides of the totality that is the "church", Luther spoke of the two-fold gemeynschafft as a singular entity, then considered the two forms separately. If a man is deprived of the sacramental-community he may remain secure and happy in the communion of Christ and the saints (sicher und selig yn der gemeynschafft Christi und aller heyligen ynnerlich). On the other hand many take the sacrament who are innerly estranged and cut off from the communion of Christ, (ob man sie auch shon mit gulden tuchern unter den hohen Altar begrub mit allem brangen, glocken und singen!).<sup>1</sup>

Wherever there is true faith and a genuine love of God, there also is the real communion, the real fruit of the sacrament. From this point of view, excommunication is merely a deprivation of external sacrament or relationship with other people (eyn beraubung des euszerlichen sacraments odder wandels mit den leuten).<sup>2</sup> By these words Luther maintained the breach between the visibility and the invisibility of the church. But the church as a whole was clearly his concern. It was his Mother as a Christian (die lieben Mutter), who must be loved and obeyed even while she, as the community of Christians (gemeyn aller Christen), wields the Ban unjustly through the existing authorities.<sup>3</sup> Obedience is not, however, unlimited. When the authority of the church is used against God and his command, or when it involves sinning against or hurting one's neighbour, then

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<sup>1</sup> LW 6,65

<sup>2</sup> LW 6,66

<sup>3</sup> LW 6,70-1



the Ban is not to be born willingly, but rejected.<sup>1</sup>

Behind all Luther's words lies the conviction that the Gospel is beyond the reach of any Ban. Where the Gospel is, there is the reality of the church. This can never be banned. Every man ought to be free to hear it. (Dan von dem Evangelio und prediget soll und mag niemand bannen noch vorbannet werden, das wort gottis soll frey bleyben yderman zuhören).<sup>2</sup>

The exegetical and devotional works of these transitional years reflect a deep sense of the invisibility of the church, and a simple awareness of the church's dependence on the Word or the Gospel. In Die sieben Busspsalmen of 1517, Luther used the Old Testament term, God's People, to describe the church. It is the New Israel, spiritual and inward (geistlich und innwendig).<sup>3</sup> Commenting on the 110<sup>th</sup> Psalm, in 1518, Luther described the Volk Christi as of grace not of nature, inwardly adorned not outwardly impressive.<sup>4</sup> They are in a kingdom that is entirely spiritual (sein reich gaistlich ist, gaistlich volk, gaistlich gewalt, gaistlich schmuck).<sup>5</sup> The ecclesia sanctorum is nevertheless a concrete fellowship. It is invisible, but present to the eyes of the spirit (oculis spiritualibus). And it comprises our brothers and friends (fratres et amici nostri).<sup>6</sup> E. Rietschel, thus, is right to a certain extent in interpreting the meaning of invisibility for Luther as

<sup>1</sup> LW 6,72-4

<sup>2</sup> LW 6,75

<sup>3</sup> LW 1,201.10

<sup>4</sup> LW 1,698

<sup>5</sup> LW 1,701

<sup>6</sup> Tessaradecas consolatoria pro laborantibus oneratis, 1520, in LW 6,130

including the possibility of the communio between Christians being experienced in faith.<sup>1</sup>

The People of God is spiritual and invisible because it is constituted not by human teaching and works, but solely by the Word and grace of God.<sup>2</sup> Election was seen as proceeding not from the secret counsel of God, as with Hus, but from the Word as it is preached and believed. Die steine Zion seynd die auszerwelten gottis, die selben werden durch die propheten, Aposteln und prediger bereit zu der gnaden. die bereytunge geschicht durch das wort gottis.<sup>3</sup> The church is also constituted at the same time by the activity of the Spirit. It is "spiritual" because the words of the Spirit of Christ are there. (Ubi ... sonus et verba spiritus sunt, ibi Ecclesia sine dubio vera est Christi).<sup>4</sup> The action of the Spirit is not apart from the sacraments. The spiritual folk is spoken of as created anew through baptism (das geistlich volck, durch die tauff Christi neue geschaffen).<sup>5</sup> In the Auslegung des 109(110). Psalms, v.5, of 1518, Luther commented that the hidden presence of Christ under the sacrament signifies that his people is also hidden and inward, and that he rules and dwells in his people hiddenly also (welchs verborgen sein Leichnam bedeut, dasz auch all sein Volk inwendig und verborgen ist, auch vor ihn selber, ... und sonderlich er selb verborgenlich regiert, und in ihnen wohnet).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix B

<sup>2</sup> Die sieben Busspsalmen, 1517, in LW 1,202

<sup>3</sup> LW 1,201

<sup>4</sup> LW 5,547

<sup>5</sup> LW 1,203

<sup>6</sup> LWE 40,28

The notion of the geistlich Volk is identical with that of the regnum fidei, which Luther maintained at Leipzig against Eck. It is that of the re-born, believing followers of Christ, invisible before the world, but possessing in Word and sacraments, the open signs of the rule of their risen King.<sup>1</sup>

Before the world, the church possesses the invisibility of humiliation, suffering and persecution. The followers of Christ are found in a "cruciform", under thorns and enmity (under die dornen und feind).<sup>2</sup> They wage a spiritual warfare, against spiritual enemies. The church is hidden (abscondita), and opposed by enemies (contraria inimicorum); but it emerges spiritually victorious (illi spiritualiter pugnent, et hi spiritualiter vincantur).<sup>3</sup> There is no other way than the way of the Cross (via ... crux Christi).<sup>4</sup> We must watch therefore lest we be diverted from this into the vita activa of works, or the vita contemplativa of speculation.<sup>5</sup>

The related idea of the shared suffering of the communio of faith, comes out strongly in the Tessaradecas consolatoria, of 1520. The reality of communio to Luther seems nowhere more plain than in this little devotional work. The church and Christ are with us in our suffering. Christ does not want us to tread a solitary path to death, but in and with the whole company of the church. Hence we should pray that our eyes may be opened that in faith we may see the church all around us

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<sup>1</sup> Gottschick, op cit, 561-3, 549-51

<sup>2</sup> LW 1,696 (LW 9,187-8)

<sup>3</sup> Operationes in Psalmos, 1519-21, in LW 5,286

<sup>4</sup> LW 5,85

<sup>5</sup> LW 5,85

(ut oremus, quo nobis aperiantur oculi et videamus Ecclesiam in circuito nostro, fidei inquam oculi).<sup>1</sup> Luther was here consciously drawing on the Pauline thought of the interdependence of the members of the body in 1 Corinthians 12.

The communio, in this work of Luther's, seems to be not merely visible to the believers as a logical deduction of faith, but also to be directly experienc<sup>ed</sup>able. E. Rietschel strongly maintains this element as an integral part of Luther's conception, while others, such as Foerster, discount this in favour of the later emphasis on institutional objectivity.<sup>2</sup> Against Rietschel's view is Luther's remark that the church is invisible even to itself (nach vor ihn selber).

The whole character of the invisible fellowship of the saints is conditioned by their involvement in a struggle with the enemy of this world. In the conflict between the Devil's and God's Kingdoms, the church is at the center. Jacob brings out finely<sup>3</sup> what Luther recognised particularly in his Auslegung deutsch des Vaterunsers für die einfältigen Laien of 1519, that the Kingdom is not yet come, for we are still in wretchedness and surrounded by enemies, and deprived of the Fatherland (wir noch vorstössen, im elendt und unter grausamen feinden seind, beraubt des allerlibsten vaters land).<sup>4</sup> In the struggle, Christ's power, and our's, lie not in worldly weapons, or in our own might or capabili-

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<sup>1</sup> LW 6,132

<sup>2</sup> See E Rietschel, op cit, 60

<sup>3</sup> See in Appendix B

<sup>4</sup> LW 2,95

ties, but in the unconquerable Word of God.<sup>1</sup>

In thinking of the visible expression of the invisible, spiritual church, he referred to the bishop with his volk coming together in the churches (kirchen).<sup>2</sup> He stressed, as in the polemical writings, that the reality of the church is not bound to a specific place (locus). This error was the characteristic impiety of Rome (impietas Romana). The congregatio spiritualis hominum subsists in faith, hope and love of the Spirit. And the visibility of the church structure finds its place only in this context.<sup>3</sup> The visible and outward realm is under Christ, even as the hidden, spiritual one, but it is subordinate to the latter. Die sichtliche und leibliche Reich oder Güter seind ... Christo alle unterthan; aber sein [geistlich verborgen] Reich stehet nit in denselben, sondern der Menschen zeitlich Reich steht in denselben, doch Christo unterworfen).<sup>4</sup>

"Through his teaching, Luther split the Church".<sup>5</sup> The judgement of Lortz and of others must be taken seriously, whether or not we think Luther's statements, that he wished the opposite, to be in good faith. It seems certain that Luther sharply distinguished, in the form of an antithesis, the basic "religious" reality from the existing juridical structure.<sup>6</sup> Lortz believes that Luther found

<sup>1</sup> Auslegung des 109(110). Psalms, 1518, in LWE 40,11

<sup>2</sup> Die sieben Busspsalmen, 1517, in LW 1,204

<sup>3</sup> Operationes in Psalmos, 1519-21, in LW 5,56-7.450

<sup>4</sup> LWE 40,8

<sup>5</sup> Lortz, Reformation in Deutschland, Freiburg, Herder, 1940, I, 392

<sup>6</sup> Strohl, op cit, 297

himself with a conception of the church that was emptied of reality. It was Luther's contention, however, that the church's reality ultimately rests on the creative, saving power of the living Christ. The visible structure of Rome had come to claim an inherent reality of its own. The conclusion that had to be drawn, therefore, was that the church, the communio of believers, created by Christ's Word and Spirit, must have a structure consonant with <sup>the</sup> form of God's redemptive activity.



### III. CONSTRUCTIVE STATEMENTS ON THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

In 1520, Luther published one of his most important treatises on the nature of the church: Von dem Bapstum zu Rom widder den hochberumpten Romanisten zu Leipzck. It was his object to write about the church in terms that the ordinary man could understand;<sup>1</sup> and to deal with the invisibility of the church, or "Christianity" (Christenheit), and also its relation to the visible existing ecclesiastical structure. He also laid down the signs whereby the authentic Christenheit might be recognised.

The work was occasioned by a polemic of Alveld of Leipzig. In characteristic terms, the Roman apologist had argued that the Pope at Rome was by divine right the head of the universal church, and the sole and highest vicar of Christ (universalis ecclesiae militantis caput, pontifex summus, primus, papa, rector, pastor, unus et solus summus Christi vicarius).<sup>2</sup> He had supported his contention by arguments drawn from Scripture, and from sound reason and knowledge (recta ratio, vera scientia, sanus intellectus, etc.). To deny the Petrine vicariate, he concluded, was to make oneself a heretic.<sup>3</sup>

Luther, by now convinced that this claim was that of Antichrist, restated the question at issue. Did the

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<sup>1</sup> LW 6,286

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in LW 6,277

<sup>3</sup> LW 6,278-9

Papacy possess authority over the whole of Christianity (Christenheit)? And were all heretics and schismatics who were outside that authority? Was the claim of Rome based on Divine ordinance? Or were the Christians who had the Gospel, sacraments and Creed, but not the Roman ecclesiastical structure, really Christians?<sup>1</sup>

Alveld argued on rational grounds that every community (gemeyne) on earth must have a bodily head under the true head (Christ). Since Christianity or the Church (Christenheit) is such a community (gemeyne), then it must also have a natural head, which is the Pope. Luther denied this. The Christian church (gemeyne) was not to be placed on the same level as any natural human association. Christ is not head of the church in the same way as he is head of a gang of robbers. The church does not have a natural human head on the analogy of such purely human and even wicked associations. Such a conception is totally at variance with that of Scripture.<sup>2</sup>

Luther also rejected Alveld's attempt to justify the Papacy on scriptural grounds. In the place of both Alveld's lines of justification, Luther set out what he called the truly Scriptural view over against the false one; an analysis which owed something to Hus's de ecclesia, which he had read not long before. Christianity, or the real church, according to Scripture, is a gathering of all Christians on earth, the communion of saints (die Christenheit heysset eyn versamlunge aller Christgleubigen auff

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<sup>1</sup> LW 6,286-7

<sup>2</sup> LW 6,290-2



erden, ... eyn gemeynschafft der heyligenn). This community or gathering includes all who live in true faith, hope and love (Diesz gemeyne odder samlung heysset aller der, die in rechten glauben, hoffnung und lieb leben). Hence its being, life and nature are not those of a material community, but a gathering of those united inwardly in one faith (der Christenheyt wesen, leben und natur sey nit leyplich vorsamlung, sondern eyn vorsamlung der hertzen in einem glauben).<sup>1</sup>

The unity of the community has no necessary outward expression. Its members may be a thousand miles apart. Yet they are a spiritual community since each preaches, accepts, hopes, loves and lives like the other. It is a spiritual unity (ein geistliche einickeit). Hence its members are called a communion of saints. Their unity is sufficient of itself (alleine gnug) to constitute real Christenheit. And without it there can be no real unity.<sup>2</sup>

Undeniably, Luther presented the true church or Christenheit, as invisible and spiritual. It is indeed a community, but world-wide, and formed of those whose faith is hid in their hearts. The principle of unity is entirely spiritual. Spatial separation has no effect on it. It is independent of material interrelationships.

He supported the "Biblical" conception of the church with two passages referring to the Kingdom: John 18<sup>36</sup>, My Kingdom is not of this world, which he took to prove that Christenheit is withdrawn from the <sup>h</sup>sphere of worldly commun-

<sup>1</sup> LW 6,292-3

<sup>2</sup> LW 6,293

ities (auszgetzogen von allen weltlichen gemeynen, das sie nit leiplich sey);<sup>1</sup> and Luke 17<sup>20-1</sup>, The Kingdom of God comes in no external or outward way (nit mit einer euszerlichen weysze) ... It is in you inwardly (inwendig). The Kingdom of God, which is Christ's Christenheit, is not at Rome or fixed to Rome, but it is anywhere where faith is real (inwendig).<sup>2</sup> Luther no longer allowed the traditional claim of the institutional church to be the divitas dei on earth. This is in fact a disastrous error (ein grawsamer yrthum). The real church is not tied to material institutions (leyplliche gemeyne) which are fixed at certain places. Its unity is not contained in, nor to be identified with the organised structure of Rome. Conformity with the latter does not make a Christian. Nor does exclusion from it make a person a heretic.<sup>3</sup> The error of the Jews was to imagine that their Messiah was to rule at Jerusalem over a political kingdom (euszerlich reich). But Christ's Kingdom is inner and spiritual (geistlich und innerlich).<sup>4</sup>

At this point he permitted himself an analogy. Just as a man has two "natures", body and soul, so the member of the church, or Christenheit, is a member according to his "soul", i.e. his faith. Hence, Christenheit, as a geistlich gemein, is as little a weltliche gemeyne as the spirit is a body. The body is rather a figure or image of the soul, and thus a bodily head, and a bodily community can only be regarded as an image for the spiritual head, and the spiritual

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<sup>1</sup> LW 6,293

<sup>2</sup> LW 6,293

<sup>3</sup> LW 6,293-4

<sup>4</sup> LW 6,295

communion. Any identification of the two, would be a fatal confusion of the weltlich with the geistlich. True Christianity lies in the realm of the spirit, and not in externals (die natuerlich, eygentlich, rechte, wesentliche Christenheit stehe ym geiste, unnd in keinem eusserlichenn ding).<sup>1</sup>

The unbiblical conception of the church, which Luther ascribed to Rome, is twofold. It is the church as a human construction. First, it is a gathering in a house or parish, diocese, archdiocese, and Papacy, where external actions such as singing, reading, or the wearing of robes, are carried out; an external cultic community. The other form is the houses set up for the service of God. Here all the energies of the church are spent, in pursuit of spiritual things that have become thoroughly worldly and material, until finally men give heed neither to the true nor the outward church (die geistlich noch leyplliche kirche).<sup>2</sup> The weltlich and the geistlich are here confounded and the result is heathendom!

The sharpness of the cleavage between the reality and the pseudo-reality of the church is seen in the reference to two churches (zwo kirchen), despite Luther's express denial that he wished to separate them.<sup>3</sup> The first church (kirche), which is the natural, basic, essential, and true one (natuerlich, grundlich, wesentlich und warhafftig), he calls a spiritual, inward Christianity (ein geystliche, ynnnerliche Christenheit). The other, which is an

<sup>1</sup> LW 6,295-6

<sup>2</sup> LW 6,296-7

<sup>3</sup> LW 6,296-7; cf Holl, op cit, 324; and Kattenbusch, op cit, 232

external construction (die gemacht und eusserlich ist), is a material, external Christianity (ein leypliche, eusserlich Christenheit). Then he added that he did not wish to separate them (nit das wir sie voneinander scheydenn wollen). This is something added to the distinctions previously given in the Sermons on Excommunication and the Sacrament. R. Seeberg makes the last statement central to his thesis, in the 1885 work, that the conception of the church is innerly differentiated, but unified.<sup>1</sup> E. Rietschel argues on the other hand, that Luther meant that the reality and bounds of the church are exhausted in the innerliche Christenheit.<sup>2</sup> What is true is that Luther has hitherto been concerned with separating out the Church from the Non-Church.

Then Luther proceeded to restate the analogy of soul and body, in conjunction with the idea of the old and new man in Romans 7<sup>22ff</sup>. He declared that the Christian community (Christlich vorsamlung) according to the soul is a fellowship united in one faith (ein gemeyne in einem glauben eintrechtig). According to the body it can not be assembled in one place, and yet each local group or congregation is gathered together in its own locale (doch ein iglicher hauff an seinem ort vorsamlet wirt).<sup>3</sup> At this point Luther seemed to be taking into account both the uni-

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<sup>1</sup> Studien zur Geschichte des Begriffes der Kirche mit besonderer Beziehung auf die Lehre von der sichtbaren und unsichtbaren Kirche, Erlangen, Deichert, 1885, 86-7

<sup>2</sup> "Luthers Anschauung von der Unsichtbarkeit und Sichtbarkeit der Kirche", in Theologische Studien und Kritiken, 1900, 412

<sup>3</sup> LW 6, 297

versal and the communal character of the church.

The external church (eusserlich Christenheit) is ruled by canon law (geistlich recht), and by the hierarchy, who are all externally reckoned as Christians. Many are indeed so, but some are not. The external church is like the body, and the real church like the soul. Some members of the external church are not in the real one, just as some members of the real church continue to be so even if excluded from the external church. Luther puts it as follows: The body does not create life in the soul, but the soul lives in the body, and also, if necessary, without the body (und auch wol an den leyp).<sup>1</sup>

The phrase auch wol an den leyp is perhaps best interpreted in the context of the Sermons on Excommunication. Luther, influenced at this point by Hus's teaching, broadened his view to include the external structure, which was not, strictly speaking, the Church.<sup>2</sup> Some, such as Sohm, have argued from it that the church according to Luther can do without all legal form, even the preaching office (predigtamt). Holl thinks of Zinzendorf's Wandergemeinde as corresponding to what Luther had in mind.<sup>3</sup> Rade would go further than Sohm and interpret Luther's words as the separation of the real church not only from its rechtlich Leib, but from all externality.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> LW 6, 296-7

<sup>2</sup> See Gottschick, op cit, 567ff.

<sup>3</sup> See Holl, op cit, 325

<sup>4</sup> See Rade, op cit, 253



R. Seeberg, on the other hand, believes it was intended only polemically,<sup>1</sup> Strohl thinks that it means outside the organised Church of Rome, not a retreat into formlessness.<sup>2</sup> It is certain that for Luther the real church of Christ no longer corresponded with the organised visible structure of Rome. The latter's aggrandisement and usurpation deprived it of its validity as a living form for Christenheit. Perhaps, further than this it is not safe to go. But, as Bohatec points out, Sohm and Holl's idea of the Wandergemeinde is difficult to justify from this passage on Luther's own basic assumption that Christ rules his church only by the Predigtamt.<sup>3</sup> The difficult question that remains is whether Luther's Predigtamt is to be interpreted in an open, institutional sense (Seeberg), or a free, community sense (Holl).

Luther finally laid down the true nature of Christenheit. First he asserted the absolute invisibility of its head (... Noch Bischoff, noch Bapst ... sondern allein Christus ym hymel ist hie das heubt und regiret allein).<sup>4</sup> How could any man as the head of the church, infuse life into the body? How could he rule the faithful, whom he does not even know? How can he confer faith, hope, and love, and grace? Ephesians 4<sup>15ff</sup> declare unmistakably that Christ is the church's invisible head.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Seeberg, op cit, 86 n 2

<sup>2</sup> Strohl, op cit, 311

<sup>3</sup> Calvins Lehre von Staat und Kirche, Breslau, Markus, 1937, 289 n 29

<sup>4</sup> LW 6,297

<sup>5</sup> LW 6,298-9



Next, he asserted the absolute invisibility of the body of the church. Were it otherwise, and according to the external ordering of the church, the Creed would run "I believe in a Holy Roman Church the communion of Romans". But it is plain that the church is not bound to Rome but a world-wide spiritual community of the faithful (die heilige kirch nit an Rom gepunden, sondern szo weyt die welt ist, in einen glauben vorsamlet, geistlich unnd nit leylich). For what is believed according to the Creed is not bodily nor visible (Dan was man gleubt, das ist nit leylich noch sichtlich).<sup>1</sup> The Roman Church is absolutely visible, therefore it is not the real church, where no one sees who is righteous or believing (niemand siht, wer heylig oder gleubig sey). The visibility of the church is not in its members.<sup>2</sup>

The church, however, does have objective institutional,<sup>3</sup> external marks of visibility, apart from the pseudo-visibility of Papal power: these are baptism, the sacrament and the Gospel, not Rome or any other place. (Die zeichenn, da bey man euszerlich mercken kan wo die selb kirch in der welt ist, sein die tauff, sacrament und das Evangelium, unnd nit Rom, disz odder der ort). Where these are, there are the saints, even if only babies in the cradle (Dan wo die tauff und Evangelium ist, da sol niemand zweyfel, es sein heyligen da, und soltens gleich eitel kind in der wigen sein).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> LW 6,300

<sup>2</sup> LW 6,301

<sup>3</sup> See E. Seeberg, Luthers Theologie II, 442

<sup>4</sup> LW 6,301

With the views expressed in this polemic, Luther uprooted the idea of the principium unitatis of Augustine, and the corpus Christianum under Papal aegis.<sup>1</sup> R. Seeberg claims that by retaining Word and sacraments as objective means of grace, Luther remained in the catholic tradition, while providing the final solution to the problem of relating community and institution in the conception of the church.<sup>2</sup> Gottschick, however, found the Leib/Seele analogy a very inadequate expression of Luther's real conception of the church. It established, he said, a visible/invisible church in concentric circles, whereas Luther's intention was a unified, invisible church, visible to faith in Word and sacraments, and in contrast to Alveld's empirical form.<sup>3</sup> For Rietschel on the other hand, Luther's view in this work was precisely that of a single unified conception. The external means of grace were detached from the external church (Äusserliche Kirche). The true Christians lived apart from the body (Leib), just as baptism was included in the community of the soul (Seele). Hence, there could be no question of concentric circles, as Seeberg (approving), and Gottschick (disapproving) had found.<sup>4</sup> Kattenbusch attempted a solution to the problem of interpretation by inverting the order of the concentric

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<sup>1</sup> Boehmer, op cit, 331-2

<sup>2</sup> R Seeberg, Begriff der Kirche, 87

<sup>3</sup> Gottschick, op cit, 567ff

<sup>4</sup> Rietschel, "Luthers Anschauung", 412ff

circles: he made the circle of invisibility wider than that of visibility. Luther in this work, he said, became clear for the first time over what was essential for the church, what was not church but world, and what part of the church (as Kultgemeinde) could be reformed on the basis of what was essential. In other words he discovered what the church was in the full sense (communio sanctorum) and what it<sup>1</sup> was in the narrow sense (Kultgemeinde).<sup>1</sup>

The problem of finally relating what Luther called Seele and Leib is a fruitless one unless we recognise what was fundamental in Luther's experience: the dynamic character of the Word as constituting the church. No "horizontal" solution of the relation between the communio sanctorum and its historical forms is possible, for the Word is the creative source of the saving community, and provides a relation to or the break from the constitutional form of the church. Against Rome, Luther saw that the Word must have freedom from the institutional structure. Where the deficiency in Luther's view is, perhaps, is in the restriction of the church to a part of its fullness as expressed by the communion of saints formula. This was the almost inevitable result of his polemical position over against the absolute visibility of Rome. And, in conjunction with the neo-platonic-Christian phraseology, it creates problems, perhaps insoluble, for the right definition of the nature of the church.

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<sup>1</sup> Kattenbusch, op cit, 276ff

The four "Reformation treatises" of 1520 do not deal directly with the church in its aspect of invisibility. In Von den guten werckenn, Luther wanted Roman power (Romischen gewalt) held in honour as our revered father (obirsten vatter), and yet because it has become insane (unsinnig), we must frustrate its endeavours (furnemens), lest Christianity (Christenheit) perish as a result.<sup>1</sup> He was on the whole more afraid of the spiritual power (geistliche Gewalt), than of the worldly (weltliche Gewalt). For the latter has nothing to do with preaching and faith, and the first three commandments.<sup>2</sup> This view of Luther's was conditioned by his immediate times. Subsequent events were to show that under the principle of cuius regio eius religio, the worldly authority (weltliche Gewalt), whether or not under that name, did exercise a determinative role in precisely the religious sphere.

The An den christlichen Adel, which was a call to the nobility to help in reforming the church, reflected Luther's drastic revision of mediaeval inequalities of spiritual status. For example, he questioned the hitherto differential treatment accorded to the different categories of priest and layman as coming only from human laws. Wirt ein priester erschlagen, szo ligt ein land ym Interdict, warumb auch nit, wen ein bawr erschlagen wirt? wo kumpt her solchs grosz unterscheyd unter den gleychen Christenn? allein ausz menschen gesetzen und tichten.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> LW 6,258

<sup>2</sup> LW 6,259

<sup>3</sup> LW 6,410

De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium, besides re-examining in the light of the Gospel the traditional sacraments, places the church under the Word. (Verbum dei enim supra Ecclesiam est incomparabiliter).<sup>1</sup> The task of the church is not to control the Word, but to discern the Word of God (verbum dei) from the human laws (verbis hominum).<sup>2</sup>

The Tractatus de libertate christiana affirms incidentally the communio sanctorum that constitutes the real church. The Christian's life is centred not in himself, but in Christ and his neighbour (Concludimus itaque, Christianum hominem non vivere in seipso, sed in Christo et proximo suo, aut Christianum non esse in Christo per fidem, in proximo per charitatem).<sup>3</sup>

The Eyne kurz form des Glaubens, 1520, sums up the views expressed in Von dem Bapstum zu Rom. First the world-wide gemeyne der heyiligen united and assembled in the Spirit, and increased by Word and sacraments, is the object of our faith (Ich glaub, das do sey auff erden, szo weyt die welt ist, nit mehr dan eyne heylige gemeyne Christliche kyrche, ... der frumen glaubigen menschen auff erden, Wilche durch den selben heyiligen geyst vorsamlet, erhalten und regiret wirt, und teglich ynn den sacramenten und wort gottis gemehret).<sup>4</sup> Then Luther went on to state, as an object of faith, the relation of communio that exists in the world-wide Christenheit. All things are common

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<sup>1</sup> LW 6,516

<sup>2</sup> LW 6,561

<sup>3</sup> LW 7,69

<sup>4</sup> LW 7,219 (10/2,393)



(gemein). What one has belongs to the other, and all the prayers and good works of the whole community come to our assistance.<sup>1</sup> Finally, the confession reaffirms that extra ecclesiam nulla salus (Ich glaub, das niemant kan selig werden, der nit ynn dieser gemeyne erffunden wirt, eyntrechtlich mit yhr haltend, in eynem glauben, wort, sacramenten, hoffnung und lieb).<sup>2</sup> Only in this gemeyne is there forgiveness of sins. Again, Luther revealed in this confession the characteristic invisibility of the church. It derived from Christ, and was built up by Word, sacrament, and the Spirit in the hearts of believers.

This is a constant theme vividly presented in his sermons of these years. The church's reality is in Christ. The Kingdom of God (regnum Dei) is to know Christ and wholly to be united to him (in illum coniicere).<sup>3</sup> The church is therefore only where the Word of Christ is. (Ubi est Ecclesia, necesse est ibi Euangelium esse, ubi non est Euangelium, ibi non est Ecclesia).<sup>4</sup> Its being preached is the only sign of Christ's presence in a place; for true Christians believing that Word are invisible (rechte Christen wandelln alleyn im glauben des Euangelii, man kan si nicht euserlich kennen ober sehen .... Man kan dy christlichen /people/ nirgent bey kennen dan alleyn beym Euangelio).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> LW 7,219 (10/2,394)

<sup>2</sup> LW 7,219 (10/2,394)

<sup>3</sup> Sermone aus den Jahren, ca 1514-20, on Mt 6,24, No man can serve two masters, in LW 4,712

<sup>4</sup> Predigten Luthers, gesammelt von Joh Poliander no 69, 27 Jan 1521, in LW 9,505

<sup>5</sup> Ibid no 83, 30 Dec 1520, in LW 9,535



Hence the Kingdom of Christ (Christi reich) is not external, but inward in the heart (nicht eusserlich sunder inwendig im hertzen).<sup>1</sup> The church is likened to a pure virgin which bears <sup>children</sup> to Christ (reynne junckfraw, die wirth schwanger von Christo und tregt kinder). These are believers (Glaubige hertznn). And, concluding the bold simile, the breasts of the bride are the preachers who nourish them (die Brueste disser braudt sein die prediger, di do milch geben, da mith sie uns nerhen).<sup>2</sup>

In one place he asked whether a believer could worship by himself out in the open (auff dem feld). Faith is enough, but, he wondered, would a person be able to think on his faith, Christ's sacrifice, sacrament and testament if they were not bodily enacted in some designated place. (Es ist war, he said, solcher glaub ist gnug und richtet es warlich allis ausz. Aber wo mochtistu an solchenn glauben, opffer, sacrament und testament gedencken, wen es nit in ettlichen benannten örtern und kirchen leylich gehandelt wurd?).<sup>3</sup> Here he was already facing the conclusion drawn by some that the invisibility as a reality derived from the invisible Christ, and not fastened to a particular saving institution, reduced the necessary relation of invisibility to visibility to an optional one.

In another sermon he distinguished between the spiritual head of the church (caput ecclesiae spiritualis)

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid no 108, 23 Mar 1521, in LW 9,632

<sup>2</sup> Ibid no 112, 29 Mar 1521, in LW 9,649

<sup>3</sup> LW 6,372

and the "mask" head of the church (caput ecclesiae larvalis et externae), who is the Pope. Christ preserves his headship by concealing his Kingdom from "carnal" eyes. Hence there can be no larvalis caput (Christus regnum suum ab oculis carnalibus absconditum habet, huius ergo regni caput in terris esse non potest).<sup>1</sup> He also distinguished three communities in the religious sphere, the secular, the ecclesiastical, which is the shadow and mask of, and imitates the true spiritual church, (quae umbram et larvam vere spiritualis ecclesiae imitatur), and the Christian, which lives in faith and love (quae in fide, spe et charitate ambulat). Only the third can truly claim to be the church, because Christ, not the Pope, is the only possible head.<sup>2</sup> Here is the most uncompromising rejection of Rome as merely a larva of the true church, and the assumption that Luther's party ("we") form part of the true church.

Finally, the church is asserted to have a double aspect: one part and aspect is for the eyes of God alone, the other for that of man (dye kirch geteyllet seye inzwewey stuecke und zcweyerley conspect hab: eynnes fur gottes angesiecht, das ander fur den leutten).<sup>3</sup> Faith is hidden for men. God sees it alone. The true people of God are not

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<sup>1</sup> "Christus caput Ecclesiae", Sermone aus den Jahren ca 1514-20, in LW 4,715-6

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 716

<sup>3</sup> Predigten Luthers gesammelt von Joh Poliander, no 94, 2 Febr 1521, in LW 9,566-7

seen by men, only by God (der glawb ist vorporgen vor den leutten, Gotth sicht in allein. Das rechtschaffen Christlich volck, die rechte Christliche kirch kennet man nicht bey den menschen, goth kennet sie allein).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, no 96, 3 Febr 1521, in LW 9,577

## IV. FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS 1521-1525

On Luther's <sup>return</sup> from his Wartburg retreat, he found the reformation already <sup>on the way</sup> ~~under weigh~~ and gathering momentum. In April and May, 1522, he made a visitation of some Saxon towns. In October, he intervened in a dispute at Erfurt between the evangelicals and a pastor whom Luther championed. In March, 1523, he drew up an order of service for the congregation at Leisnig,<sup>1</sup> and in November and December, an order for Wittenberg. These, he insisted, were in no way normative for the movement as a whole. At the end of 1524, Mass was abolished at the Chapter in Wittenberg, and the Dean and Canons were forced to leave.<sup>2</sup>

Amid the stress of guiding this reform movement, Luther continued his controversy with the defenders of the Papacy. He had to define more clearly what he meant by calling the church a spiritual gathering (geystlich vorsamlung), and how it stood in relation to the existing visible forms of the church. In Auf das überchristlich ... Buch Books Emsers Antwort, of 1521, Luther first had to answer the charge of constructing a "Platonic church" (Da ich die Christliche kirch ein geystlich vorsamlung genennet het, spottistu meyn, als wolt ich ein kirch bawen wie Plato ein statt).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See LW 12,35f

<sup>2</sup> Mackinnon, Luther and the Reformation, London, Longmans, 1929, 3,102-17

<sup>3</sup> LW 7, 683

Did Luther not want something with spiritual (geistlich) walls and towers; whereas the church obviously cannot exist without bodily state, location and goods (leyplich statt, rawm und gütter)? For answer, Luther pointed to Scripture verses: Romans 2<sup>11</sup>, God is no respecter of persons; Luke 17<sup>20</sup>, The Kingdom of God is within you, not lo here, or lo the re!; John 3<sup>6</sup>, What is born of the spirit is spirit; and, later, Philippians 3<sup>20</sup>, For our conversation is in Heaven.<sup>1</sup> Not many of these verses are relevant, but Luther placed the weight of his arguments on those dealing with the Kingdom. If Murner, whom Luther was answering here, equated the church with the Kingdom of God, how, Luther replied, can the clear words of Christ be denied? There is no state, space or external form in the Kingdom of God, and it is neither here nor there (Es sey kein statt, rawm noch euszerliche weysze am reych gottis, und sey nit hie noch da).<sup>2</sup> Hence, the Christian church is not bound to any place, person or time.

It cannot be so bound. For the church is an object of faith according to the Creed, and what is believed, according to Hebrews 11<sup>1</sup>, cannot be seen. Hence no one can see or feel the church, or say it is here or there (die heilige Christliche kirch niemant sehen kan noch fulen, mag auch nit sagen "sich, hie odder da ist sie").<sup>3</sup> For what is believed cannot be seen, and what is seen is not requiring to be believed. Then Luther neatly drew up a contrast between the invisible church of faith under Christ, and the visible church of Rome under the Pope:

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<sup>1</sup> LW 7,684

<sup>2</sup> LW 7,683

<sup>3</sup> LW 7,684

"Die heilige kirche Christi spricht also:  
 'Ich glaube ein heylige Christliche kirche.'  
 Die tolle kirch des Bapsts spricht also:  
 'Ich sehe ein heylige Christliche kirche.'  
 Jene spricht: 'Die kirche ist widder hie nach da.'  
 Diese spricht: 'Die kirche ist hie und da.'  
 Jhene spricht: 'Die kirche ligt an keyner person.'  
 Diese spricht: 'Die kirche ligt am Bapst.'  
 Jhene spricht: 'Die kirch ist nit auff ein zeytlich  
 ding gepawet.' Diese spricht: 'Die kirch ist auff  
 den Pabst gepawen.' "1

The church is here being cut loose from the juridical order of Rome, and restored to its New Testament character as deriving immediately from faith in Christ. In this sense the church must remain invisible for Murner and the Papists as a spiritual city which is built in the spirit invisibly on the rock which is Christ (eyn geystliche statt, die ym geyst unsichtlich auff den felsz Christum gepawen stett).<sup>2</sup> This statement supports Ritschl's contention that the idea of invisibility is to be taken in a polemical context. The church, thus, is invisible to those for whom the juridical structure is essential.<sup>3</sup>

The same line of argument is presented, and carried somewhat further in Ad librum eximii Magistri Nostri Magistri Ambrosii Catharini, defensoris Silvestri Prieratis acerrimi responsio, 1521. The work contains, for the most part, an attack upon the Pope as Antichrist, from an exegesis of Daniel 8<sup>23-5</sup>; but in some early pages he examined the Papal claim based on Matthew 16<sup>18</sup>, and from there went on to speak of the true church. The works of Christ in this verse refer only to that Church which is

<sup>1</sup> LW 7,685

<sup>2</sup> LW 7,686

<sup>3</sup> See on Ritschl, in Appendix B



built in the Spirit on the rock, (<sup>Christ</sup> in spiritu aedificatam super Petram Christum).<sup>1</sup> Hence, as this rock is without sin and invisible (sine peccato, invisibilis), and perceivable by faith alone (sola fide perceptibilis), so, necessarily, is the church also (sine peccato, invisibilis et spiritualis, sola fide perceptibilis).<sup>2</sup> For the foundation and the building must be of the same material (eiusdem conditionis). Presumably this placing of the Body on the same level as the Head is related to his doctrine of justification. The justified are raised up by their justification in Christ to Christ's own level. The statement should also not be understood apart from a certain polemical extremeness.

Another proof is that given above: the argument from Hebrews 11<sup>1</sup> as applied to the third article of the Creed. Then he concluded that <sup>Matthew 18</sup> 16 cannot be harmonised with the Papacy and its visible church (ecclesia visibilis)! The latter term Luther rarely used. Here it refers to the false church of the Pope, the <sup>go</sup> Synagogue of Satan (Synagoga Satanae).<sup>3</sup>

In another proof based on <sup>Matthew</sup> 16<sup>18b</sup>, the gates of Hell shall not prevail against the church, he equates the true church with the communion of Saints. The gates of Hell do prevail against sinners, the Pope is a sinner, therefore he and his church are of Satan! But Christ the righteous (iustus) is the king of righteousness (rex iustitiae), and the church of Christ is the communio sanctorum.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> LW 7,709

<sup>2</sup> LW 7,710

<sup>3</sup> LW 7,710

<sup>4</sup> LW 7,712

He then proceeded to meet the objection that if the whole church is in the Spirit (in spiritu) and completely spiritual (res omnino<sup>n</sup> spiritualis), no one knows where any part of it is in the world. The church, he answered must, and does live in the flesh (in carne), but not after the flesh (secundum carnem).<sup>1</sup> It is involved in the things of the world but is not judged according to these. Here he was conscious of 2 Cor. 10<sup>3</sup> ... though in the flesh, ...not ... after the flesh; and Gal. 1<sup>11</sup>, the Gospel is not ... after man. And beside the passages mentioned in the preceding work, he also mentioned Romans 14<sup>17</sup>, the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink. Hence, he said, the church (ecclesia), is not without place and body (sine loco et corpore), and yet these are not, nor pertain to the ecclesia. Hence, all things are free and indifferent, the liberty of the spirit rules (omnia sunt libera et indifferentia. ... Libertas enim spiritus hic regnat).<sup>2</sup> All places are suitable for the Christian and any pastor that feeds his flock is truly a pastor. The church, thus, has to have pastors, and ecclesiastical organisation, but there is no one priesthood and ecclesiastical order that alone is valid.<sup>3</sup>

There must, however, be a particular point where men can assemble with confidence that there is the church. This point is the visible sign (visibile signum) of Baptism, the Bread and the Gospel. The last is the creator and sustainer of the church: or, in a word, tota vita et substantia

<sup>1</sup> LW 7,719

<sup>2</sup> LW 7,720

<sup>3</sup> LW 7,720



Ecclesiae est in verbo dei.<sup>1</sup> Hence, for Luther, any discussion of the nature of the church would begin with the Word. And those in the church are simply those who have appropriated the Word in faith by preaching and the sacraments.

The main elements in Luther's view of the real church of Christ were laid down by this time. But it remained to see the new understanding realised in reformed communities of the one Christenheit. In the years between 1521 and 1525, his controversial and exegetical works and sermons reflect the same position, broadly, as that developed in the principal works of 1520-1 dealing with the church. Several emphases are to be noticed.

There is as before a constant reiteration of the invisibility of the church as the church of the Word, (Hie hörestu, dasz es ein reich auf Erden ist, und ist doch unsichtbar, hänget und stehet alleine im Worte).<sup>2</sup> It is also on earth hidden among men in faith and the Spirit (Ein heimlich geistlich reich ist, und ist doch auff erden unter den menschen, aber ym glauben und geist verborgen).<sup>3</sup> It is, again, an inner kingdom (regnum internum), since the believer sees, not with the eyes, but with faith, that the risen Christ rules over it. (Christi regnum est spirituale,

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<sup>1</sup> LW 7,721

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on Jn 16<sup>5-15</sup>, Kirchenpostille 1523, in LWE 12,110

<sup>3</sup> 7 Busspsalmen, 1525, Ps 102<sup>19</sup>, in LW 18,514

quod non sentitur sensu, .... Internum regnum: ibi nihil humani, sed solus Christus, qui non oculis sed corde videtur, quod sedeat ad dexteram et sit deus meus).<sup>1</sup> The church is, further, a spiritual kingdom (geistlich reich) in which Christ rules invisibly through the Word alone, not through external material power (unsichtbar und nicht äusserlicher, leiblicher Gewalt; ... allein durchs Wort. [i.e.] ... ein mündlich Wort oder Predigamt). For Christ has died and left the world, and therefore cannot rule externally and visibly (äusserlich und sichtbarlich).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, no one can tell who believes in the heart. No one knows the sheep but the shepherd, Christ, alone.<sup>3</sup> The church of Christ is spiritual (geistlich) in God's eyes, and visible only to him.<sup>4</sup> Luther by no means passed over election. And this awareness, that God will not have all men in heaven (Got wirt nicht alle menschen ynn hymel lassen), and that his own people are exactly numbered (die seynen wirtt er gar genaw zelen),<sup>5</sup> increased his emphasis on the hiddenness of the true church. In the De servo arbitrio, of 1525, occurred a succinct statement of Luther's continued stress on this characteristic:

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on Jn 16<sup>16</sup>, 1525 in LW 17/1,193-4

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on Jn 16<sup>5-15</sup>, Kirchenpostille 1523, in LW 12,120

<sup>3</sup> Sermon on Jn 10<sup>12-16</sup>, Kirchenpostille 1523, in LW 12,49

<sup>4</sup> On Hebrews 9<sup>11-16</sup>, Fastenpostille 1525, in LW 17/2,228

<sup>5</sup> Sermon on 1 Pt 1<sup>2</sup>, 1523, in LW 12,262

abscondita est Ecclesia, latent sancti.<sup>1</sup> The church is the work of a God who reveals himself in hiddenness and contrary to appearances.

Secondly, Luther held together the Word and the believing community, the communio sanctorum. He is constantly making the Word and faith the subject of his utterances, and relating the Word to the church. The Word can do without the church, but not vice versa. The church is narrower than the Word (geringer). It is the child of the Word. And it is ruled and judged by it.<sup>2</sup> The Word does not require any special locality, it lives in the human heart (ym hertzen).<sup>3</sup> The church has only to do with the Word. And from this point of view all its activities, such as private masses, must be judged.<sup>4</sup> In the church, the Word is the first thing to look for. The church can never control the Word, neither in strongboxes, nor in strongholds, neither in robes nor in ornaments, for it dwells in the heart (weder in kasten noch schlösser, es laszt sich nit klayden noch zieren, sonder es stat im hertzen).<sup>5</sup> The Word is the church's authority, and Christ's sceptre of rule.<sup>6</sup> And it

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<sup>1</sup> LW 18,652

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on Mt 28<sup>10</sup>, 1525, in LW 17/1,99

<sup>3</sup> Ermahnung zum Frieden auf die zwölf Artikel der Bauerschaft in Schwaben, 1525, in LW 18,323

<sup>4</sup> De abroganda missa privata, 1521, in LW 8,419-20

<sup>5</sup> Sermon on Jn 18<sup>36</sup>, 1522, in LW 10/3,78

<sup>6</sup> On Heb 1<sup>8</sup>, Kirchenpostille 1522, in LW 10/1,176



remains throughout, an infallible sign of the church's presence. He likened it to the standard of an army, as a surer indication than numbers, or holiness (Denn gleych wie man an dem heerpanier erkennet als bey eym gewisszen tzeychen, was fur eyn herr und heer tzu felde ligt, also erkennet auch gewisz an dem Euangelio wo Christus und seyn heere ligt. ... wie wenig yhr ymer sey und wie sundlich und geprechlich sie auch seyn).<sup>1</sup>

Behind Luther's stress on the Word, went the reliance on Scripture. In its first years, the Lutheran leadership, lay and clerical, relied on the direct knowledge of Scripture against Rome, and positively in forming evangelical communities.<sup>2</sup>

In this period, also, Luther insisted on the requirement of personal faith for membership in the church of Christ. The church is the group of believers in Christ (der hauff Christglewbiger leutt).<sup>3</sup> They are all alike in one faith.<sup>4</sup> Without this faith receiving the sacrament is a mere show (ein eusserlich wesen, in welchen die Christenheit nit steet). The church exists only in faith (alleyn im glauben).<sup>5</sup> And Luther rarely explained the church's

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<sup>1</sup> Dass ein Christliche Versammlung oder Gemeine Recht und Macht habe, alle Lehre zu urtheilen usw., 1523, in LW 11,408

<sup>2</sup> Ranke, History of the Reformation in Germany, London, Longman, 1845, II, 87

<sup>3</sup> Kirchenpostille 1522, in LW 10/1(1),140

<sup>4</sup> On 1 Pt 2<sup>5</sup>, 1523, in LW 12,306

<sup>5</sup> Sermon 1522, in LW 10/3,49



nature from the Creed, as he was fond of doing, without reference to the sancti as fideles (nihil aliud vocabis ecclesiam quam 'communione sanctorum'. Ut witenberg est communio civium, Ita 'ecclesia' dicitur omnes fideles, qui sunt in orbe).<sup>1</sup> Between believers and unbelievers is a vast gulf. The former belong to the Kingdom of Christ, the latter to the world's kingdom. The believers live freely by faith in the Word, the unbelievers are ruled by the sword (Wilche nun nicht glewben, die sind nicht Christen, die gehören ... unter das weltliche reych, das man sie mit dem schwerd und euserlichem regiment zwingt und regire. Die Christen thun von yhn selbs ungezwungen alles gütts und haben gnüg fur sich alleyn am Gottis wortt).<sup>2</sup>

Of the relation of communio between Christ and the fideles, two examples may be given. The first concerns the Bride-Bridegroom analogy, and is found in Das Magnificat verdeutschet und ausgelegt, 1521. Here the communication of the qualities of the one to the other is stressed. The church, like the bride, has power over all that her bridegroom has. Men do in faith what God wants, and God in turn what men want. Hence the church is formed by God, and its members share his lordship and power:

"Durch Christum die Christenheit mit got alsoz voreynigt ist, wie ein braut mit yhrem breudgam, das die braut recht und macht hat zu des breudgamsz leyb und allis was er hat, wilchs geschicht allis durch den glauben, da thut der mensch, was got wil, und widderumb got, was der mensch wil, alsoz das Israel ein got-formiger und gotmechtiger mensch ist, der in got, mit

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on the Creed, 1523, in LW 11,53

<sup>2</sup> Von weltlicher Oberkeit, 1523, in LW 11,271

got und durch got ein herr ist, alle ding zuthun und vormugen." (1

The second is from a sermon of 1523 where Luther in a vivid metaphor says that with Christ we form "eyn kuchen", we are baked into a single cake. As individual grains of meal, we are ground up into flour and become eyn ding. No one exists for himself, but each is thrown amongst, and mingles with the others through love (keyner ist fur sich selbst, sondern eyn yeglicher wyrfft und breyt sich unter den anderen durch die liebe).<sup>2</sup>

Another emphasis is that placed on the church (Christenheit) in its freedom from external power and things, and its dependence only on Christ. In the Old Testament, said Luther, God undertook both the inner and the external rule of his people (ynerlich and euserlich regiment). But now he rules spiritually through Christ, and externally through the political and worldly authority (regirt er ... nur geystlich durch Christum, aber das leyblich und euserlich regiment richt er durch die weltliche ubirkeit ausz).<sup>3</sup> Hence those in Christenheit are lords over all externality, and are not bound to any material thing (leyblich ding).<sup>4</sup> The spiritual rule (Christlich regiment) is not in opposition to the worldly, nor vice versa! They are on different levels.<sup>5</sup>

Hence in the regnum Christi there is no law, but the

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1 LW 7,597

2 LW 12,488

3 On 1 Pt 2<sup>15</sup>, 1523, in LW 12,275-6

4 LW 12,276

5 On 1 Pt 2<sup>15</sup>, 1523, in LW 12,331

freedom of the Spirit. He who has the spirit, does from the heart (ex profundo corde) all the works required by the law, but he is not bound to persons or places (Christianismus facit liberas animas, non corpora, externa lest got ghen, wie es ghet. ... und fraget nicht so gros darnach).<sup>1</sup>

There can be no compulsion, from externally binding laws. Otherwise faith and Christianity disappear (gehet bald der glawb und das Christlich wesen unter).<sup>2</sup> This means too that the church is not founded on an ordered historical succession of bishops or their successors (gar nichts gebunden an ordentliche successio oder Regierung der bischofe oder ihrer Nachfolger).<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, the real church (Christenheit) is dispersed here and there throughout the world without any constituted, external rule (hin und wieder in der Welt ohn einige gefaszte äusserliche Regierung).<sup>4</sup> The latter corresponds more to the Apostolic type; while Rome's constitution follows the Jewish.

Luther sharply divided the members of the free Christenheit from the rest, as e.g. in Von weltlicher Obrigkeit, 1523, where the true believers in Christ are in Christ's kingdom, and the rest in that of the world.<sup>5</sup> The former need no temporal sword or law. But the mass of the people, though baptised, and Christian in name, need

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<sup>1</sup> Sermons on Ex, 1524-7, in LW 16,244; and sermon 1524, in LW 15,690

<sup>2</sup> On 1 Pt 2<sup>16</sup>, 1523, in LW 12,331

<sup>3</sup> Sermon, Kirchenpostille, 1523, in LW 12,50

<sup>4</sup> LW 12,50

<sup>5</sup> LW 11,249

the weltliches Regiment. (... die welt und die menge ist und bleybt unchristen, ob sie gleych alle getaufft und Christen heyssen).<sup>1</sup> This remark is important because it suggests that Luther then was far from thinking in terms of a rechtliche Landeskirche.<sup>2</sup> He expressly stated that a common Christlich regiment over the world, or over a country, or regional group (menge), was out of the question.<sup>3</sup> But it must be acknowledged that everything said may be interpreted in accordance with the Landeskirche constitution, where the church has no independent constitution structure, and does not ever claim the mass of the baptised to be believing Christians.

The conception of free Christenheit, Luther tended to read back into Augustine. Augustine had said, against the Manichees, that he would not have believed the Gospel, had he not believed the church. Luther interpreted the 'church' as the whole Christenheit, not as an institutional structure. Then he slightly reinterpreted Augustine by continuing that he does not accept the Gospel because it is received by the whole Christenheit, but because it is the Gospel! (Es musz eyn iglicher alleyn darumb glawben, das es gottis wort ist und das er ynnwendig befinde, das es warheyt sey, ob schon eyn engell vom hymell und alle welt

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<sup>1</sup> LW 11,251

<sup>2</sup> i.e., a church coextensive with a political unit.

<sup>3</sup> LW 11,251-2

da widder prediget).<sup>1</sup> But, the Gospel is naturally found only in Christenheit. Hence the sense in which Christenheit is the confirmation of the Gospel's truth. It is clear here, and generally, that in comparison with the Word of the Gospel, Christenheit tends to become a pale and unsubstantial shadow. Luther could not compare them in fact, for the Word was the tota vita et substantia Ecclesiae!<sup>2</sup>

While thus stressing the freedom of Christenheit, he never thought of it as mystical or unreal. Always the human preaching of the Word kept it in relation to the particular congregation. Like Joseph with Mary, the minister (kirchen diener) is always with the church. Hence the church has the Word, and if anyone wants to find Christ, he should first find the church, and ask there, not try to build a bridge up to heaven by his own reason.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, against the Zwickau prophets and the Anabaptists, he insisted that Christenheit always lives in a context of constitutional authority (ordenliche gewallt).<sup>4</sup> And against Karlstadt, he refused to allow what God had made material (leyplich) to<sup>be</sup> spiritualised, as in the sacrament. He thus steered between the Romans, who made spiritual Christianity a bodily,

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<sup>1</sup> Von Menschenlehre zu meiden und Antwort auf Sprüche, 1522, in LW 10/2, 89-90. - Calvin also discussed these words of Augustine (see Evangelio credituram negat nisi Ecclesiae ipsum moveret autoritas) in Inst 1.7.3, COS 3, 67-8

<sup>2</sup> LW 7, 721

<sup>3</sup> On Lu 2<sup>15-20</sup>, Kirchenpostille, 1522, in LW 10/1(1), 140

<sup>4</sup> Ein Brief an die Fürsten zu Sachsen von dem aufrührischen Geist, 1524, in LW 15, 220



external community (geystliche Christenheyt eyne leybliche eusserliche gemeyne), and the Anabaptists, who made spiritual (geystlich) what God had made material (leyblich), as in the sacrament, and material and visible (leyblich), what God had made spiritual (geystlich), as in the communion of those receiving the sacrament. This communion, however, is not visible (nicht sichtbarlich) among the unbelieving (unheyligen).<sup>1</sup>

As Ritschl has pointed out, in different ways both the Roman Church, and the Anabaptists made leiblich or visible, what Luther insisted was geistlich or invisible. And yet, for Luther, their visibility was the false one, while Luther's invisibility issued in the only true visibility that the church possesses in this world.<sup>2</sup>

Another constant emphasis during these years is the desperate struggle of Christenheit against the kingdom of this world. The church is invisible in the sense of being in but not of the world. And it is, therefore, subjected to persecution. (Denn weil das Reich Christi ... nicht von der Welt sondern geistlich, und j<sup>e</sup>tzt auf der Erden unsichtbar ist, so gehet der Welt Macht und Gewalt, die sie hat auf Erden, wider die Christenheit mit ihrem Verdammen, Verfolgen, Martern, Plagen, Töden und Morden durch Schwert, Feur, Wasser, und was sie vermag).<sup>3</sup> It is ruled, during the present age and until the day of judgement, by Christ through his humanity (durch seyne menscheyt).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Widder die himmlischen Propheten, von den Bildern und Sakrament, 1525, in LW 18, 168-72.181

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B

<sup>3</sup> Sermon on Jn 16<sup>5-15</sup>, Kirchenpostille, 1523, in <sup>12,</sup> LWE 141

<sup>4</sup> On 2 Pt 1<sup>16-18</sup>, in LW 14, 28



This idea, he apparently took over from Biel.<sup>1</sup> Christ's followers are transferred from the world's into his kingdom solely by the power of divine grace. And even there, according to the external man, they are persecuted ceaselessly as long as they continue in the world.<sup>2</sup> It is this that makes the true church always a hidden remnant (reliquiae) which, under Rome, was persecuted by the "nominal church".<sup>3</sup>

The remnant is afflicted within by sin. Hence Christ's Kingdom is a hospital where the sick in body and soul lie (Christi regnum ergo est hospital, ubi iacent infirmi an leib und sel).<sup>4</sup> It is a kingdom of sinners (regnum peccatorum). Nevertheless in the midst, is the Christian church, although unseen and unknown (Christiani non videntur et non agnoscuntur).<sup>5</sup>

During these years, Luther had to take the first steps towards providing a form for Christenheit. The basis was the priesthood of all believers.<sup>6</sup> In the Old Testament, the priesthood was eusserlich und leyblich, but after Christ, all true Christians (rechte Christen) form the priesthood (das heylige und geystliche priesterthum) built up on the rock which is Christ. They as priests possess all

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<sup>1</sup> See Kohlmeyer, in Appendix B

<sup>2</sup> De Servo arbitrio, in LW 18,782

<sup>3</sup> LW 18,650-1

<sup>4</sup> Sermon on Mt 18<sup>21ff</sup>, 1525, in LW 17/1,461

<sup>5</sup> LW 17/1,462

<sup>6</sup> Answer to Emser, 1521, in LW 8,253

authority and right (gewallt, recht).<sup>1</sup> Rieker contends that the universal priesthood is a purely religious and not a constitutional principle. But Holl denies this with some justification. Luther held that every member of the church (<sup>gantze</sup> die gemeyne aller menschen), has the authority (gewallt) to forgive sins and to preach the Gospel,<sup>2</sup> then it follows that they may in a given gathering (gemeinde), choose teachers and preachers to proclaim the Gospel openly, and to exercise openly the right which all have (Weyl ... Christlich gemeyne on gottis wortt nicht seyn soll noch kan, folget aus vorigem starck gmug das sie dennoch ja lerer und prediger haben müssen, die das wortt treyben).<sup>3</sup> And since these are not to be found among the papists, the evangelicals must according to Scripture, call and install those endowed with the necessary gifts (müssen wyr uns nach der schrift halten und unter uns selb beruffen und setzen die ienigen, so man geschickt datzu findet und die gott mit verstand erleucht und mit gaben datzu getziert hatt).<sup>4</sup>

Luther, as Bohatec shows against Sohm, used the key passage Mt.18<sup>20</sup> (Where two or three ...) to support this

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<sup>1</sup> LW 8,248.253 and Commentary on 1 Pt 2<sup>5</sup>, 1523, in LW 12,306-7

<sup>2</sup> Von Anbeten des Sakraments des heiligen Leichnams Christi, 1523, in LW 11,451

<sup>3</sup> ... Gemeyne recht und macht habe ..., 1523 in LW 11,411

<sup>4</sup> LW 11,411

constitutional principle. If Christ gives such power (of his presence) to two or three, how much more does he give it to the Gemeinde, that from the universal priesthood of its members, selects its ministers of the Word.<sup>1</sup>

The norm for this Gestalt is the Apostolic church. Commenting on Acts 6<sup>lff</sup>, referring to the institution of the diaconate, Luther said that it gives a true picture of a church form (recht bild eins geystlichen regiments) which takes care of the bodies and souls of its members.<sup>2</sup>

Christenheit becomes concrete in the Gemeinde. Nevertheless the true believers are not known. According to the rule of love all baptised members of the Gemeinde are reckoned as members of Christenheit (Ecclesiam Dei eos voco ... canone charitatis, non canone fidei. ... sanctum vocat quemlibet baptisatum. ... Fides vero nullum vocat sanctum nisi divino iudicio declaratum).<sup>3</sup> And yet there are many within the Gemeinde who are not of Christenheit (intra ecclesiam tamen non de ecclesia). Not are they really a part of the Gemeinde. They are like sputum in the body (in corpore, non de corpore);<sup>4</sup> false Christians (falsche Christen) without faith, who still trust in their own righteousness.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> De instituendis ministris Ecclesiae, in LW 12,191; see also Bohatec, op cit, 295

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 1523, in LW 12,693

<sup>3</sup> De servo arbitrio, in LW 18,652

<sup>4</sup> On Zeph 3<sup>12</sup>, 1524, in LW 13,474

<sup>5</sup> Sermon on Lu 2, Kirchenpostille, 1522, in LW 10/1(1),395

There is one instance, in a sermon of 1523, where Luther went further and expressed his longing for an ecclesiola of real believers within the larger Gemeinde. The time had not come, the Word had not yet been preached sufficiently. But he would like to gather all real believers into one place (Aber also kund man anrichten und dahyn bringen, wie ich gerne wolt, das man die, so da recht gleubten, kund uff ein ort sundern. Ich wolt es wol lengst gerne thon haben, aber es hat sich nicht wollen leyden, denn es noch nicht genug gepredigt unnd triben ist worden).<sup>1</sup> As Hermelink warns,<sup>2</sup> too much should not be drawn from this local "pedagogical" suggestion. But it illustrates Luther's concern with the Gemeinde during these and the following years.

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon 1523, LW 12,485

<sup>2</sup> Hermelink, "Zu Luthers Gedanken über Ideal-Gemeinden und von weltlicher Obrigkeit", in Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte, Gotha, vol 29 (1908), no 3,273-4

V. DURING THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE  
EINZELGEMEINDEN AND THE LANDESKIRCHE

During 1521-25, Luther, having looked in vain for the Emperor and princes to initiate reforms, turned to directing the establishment of single evangelical congregations (Einzelgemeinden), e.g., those at Leisnig and Prague. The Peasant War came as an apocalyptic explosion, beyond the power of Luther and his friends to guide and direct. And its aftermath of retribution and bitterness made the forming of a popular evangelical church on democratic lines extremely difficult. Luther remained by the only strong authority, that of the Prince, and rejected the plan for an autonomous self-ruling church proposed by Francis Lambert. This project was received favourably at the Synod of Hesse in October, 1526, and was an implementation of Luther's own doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. It was also akin to the churches organised in some of the imperial cities.

Instead, Luther consolidated his movement with the active assistance and direction of the Princes. But he showed no desire to impress a rigid uniformity on the congregations.<sup>1</sup> Even his German Mass of 1526 was not to be taken as normative. At the Diet of Speyer in 1526, the Protestant party assumed they had been granted the authority to proceed with the reconstruction of the church in the

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<sup>1</sup> Mackinnon, op cit, III, 280-91

territories under their control. In November of that year, Luther proposed to the Elector John of Saxony that a survey and visitation be made. Saxony was divided into four circles, of which Wittenberg was one. These circles bore little relation to the traditional diocesan units. Saxony, the political unit, comprised fragments of 10 to 12 bishoprics. The Wittenberg Kreis alone contained portions of three bishoprics. The Visitors, theologians and jurists, made a wide and detailed survey. The following year, 1527, by an Instruction and Command, the Elector assumed formally the power to introduce a church constitution.<sup>1</sup> Then in the following years, the new form slowly took shape. In the Wittenberg Kreis, e.g., after the third visitation, in 1532, parishes were defined, and arrangements were made to provide for education, poor relief, the payment of the clergy, and the provision of an adequate liturgy. In 1538 a central ecclesiastical authority was projected on the basis of the mediaeval consistorial courts of the Bishops. But the ius episcopale was now exercised under the Prince, not the Bishop. Similar arrangements were made for the other circles. Then in 1542, Saxony moved towards a centralised administration for its Landeskirche.<sup>2</sup>

During all this practical activity, Luther continued to preach and write about the church as Christenheit. As before, we find an uncompromising assertion of the church's invisibility. The Kingdom of Christ is not at all weltlich

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<sup>1</sup> Mackinnon, op cit, III, 292-7

<sup>2</sup> Lindsay, History of the Reformation, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1906, I, 400-16



und sichtbar, but geistlich und unsichtbar, corresponding to the geistlich, unsichtbar nature and rule of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Just as Christ is in the world invisible (invisibiliter), so his followers are also invisibiliter ... in mundo. For the world sees neither them nor the in-dwelling Christ (Christum in nobis).<sup>2</sup> The members of Christ's Kingdom are spiritual (geistliche menschen), hidden (verporgen) and unrecognisable in the flesh. They, and Luther spoke of them in the first person plural, have nothing to do with the ostentation of the external church (eusserliche kirche).<sup>3</sup> In an important passage in his Galatians commentary, the church is said to be invisible, dwelling with the Spirit in an inaccessible region (invisibilis, habitans in Spiritu in loco inaccessibili). Its holiness (sanctitas) is invisible, because God hides the church under infirmities, sin, and error, under the form of the Cross (variis formis crucis), and under scandals, that according to the flesh (secundum sensum), it may never be apparent. Hence men are immediately repelled by those who are baptised and believers in the Word, and prefer to find the church in monastic orders etc. which follow the teaching and rules of men (doctrinae et mandata hominum). They invert the article of faith from credo ecclesiam to video ecclesiam.<sup>4</sup>

The distinction or contradiction between the outer condition of the church and its inner holiness, is also most

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<sup>1</sup> 1526, in LW 19,162-3

<sup>2</sup> Tischreden no 62, 1531, in LW (Tischreden) 1,21

<sup>3</sup> Festpostille, 1527, in LW 17/2,422

<sup>4</sup> LWE XXXI,38

pronounced. The church is seen as a heretical volck, infamous in the sight of the world, the Devil, and themselves.<sup>1</sup> And yet, while outwardly (secundum speciem externam) the church is afflicted by God (percussa a domino), inwardly, and in the spirit (intus et in spiritu) the church reigns over the whole world. This contradiction is the scandalum. The church is exposed to mockery, it appears to be deserted by God, but all this is the foolishness of God that hides under the cross (stulticia dei sub cruce latens). Hence, sub cruce the church is not seen but must be believed.<sup>2</sup>

In the light of Calvin's doctrine of the vera ecclesiae facies, it is important to make clear Luther's position here. It is that the face of the church is always sub contraria before the world. No other expression on the face of the church appears than that by which men come to call it the Devil's bride, deserted by Christ. (Ideo nullus visus apparet in facie ecclesiae quam ea, quae dicuntur: vocatur sponsa diaboli, deserta a Christo).<sup>3</sup>

At this point Luther seemed to identify to some extent Christenheit with his own movement, and to make the widest possible separation from the Papacy. But he also thought of an inner and external side in Christenheit itself. The external

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon 1531, in LW 34/2, 518

<sup>2</sup> Vorlesung über Jesaias 1527-30, on Is 60<sup>10</sup>  
in LW 31/2, 506

<sup>3</sup> Praelectio in psalmum 45, 1532 [1533], in  
LW 40/2, 558

side is presented to the world.<sup>1</sup> The former is the face turned, so to speak, towards Christ. The latter is likened to the old man, the former to the new. Faith is the crux of the matter, and there is no attempt to divide the totality, but to consider the inner as in respect to faith, the outer in respect to the flesh. (... doch nicht, das der mensch zwey ding sey, Soviel wir den glauben haben, sind wir new, soviel wir nicht gleuben, sind wir alt. ... soviel du gleubest, bistu ein new mensch durch und durch und widerumb).<sup>2</sup> Here is a clear presentation of Christenheit as the church of the justified (simul justus et peccator).<sup>3</sup> It could not be more radically different from the civitas platonica. Nor here is the attempt to distinguish hypocrites from the real members in evidence. Christenheit is conceived as a whole, comprising justified sinners who as believers are invisible, as unbelievers are visible.

The relation between the two levels is a dynamic one, and set in the wider context of the struggle between Christ and the Devil. Christenheit or the regnum Christi is a kingdom of salvation, conquering and ruling in the midst of the kingdom of Satan, and in the midst of crucifixion (in medio regni sathanae et in media cruce). Hence, as a spiritual kingdom, the church is not seen by carnal men (a carnalibus hominibus non videtur).<sup>4</sup> In the light of

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on Gen, 1527, in LW 24,557

<sup>2</sup> LW 24,557

<sup>3</sup> In epistolam Pauli ad Galatas commentarius, 1519, in LW 2,497

<sup>4</sup> In Genesin Declamationes, 1527, in LW 24,466

the ultimate conflict between God and Satan, involving everlasting life or death for the human soul, church order, laws and regulations appear quite relative. Luther in characteristic German fashion, fastens on the ultimate thing, and relegates all secondary things to insignificance.

He made an interesting point in connection with this spiritual conflict, that the assault on the Christian by his Satanic enemies is to be born for the sake of our brethren that they also may give their allegiance to Christ (so nach uns sollen geboren werden und auch zu Christo komen).<sup>1</sup> It is better to suffer in this way, than that any of our brothers should be lost or remain behind. Here a missionary note comes out. The invisible, hidden suffering Kingdom of Christ is no elusive ideal, <sup>but</sup> the witnessing church of believers in the form of a servant.

Historically, perhaps, Luther's conception is correlative to the extreme political insecurity of the time. The evangelical party were, from time to time, threatened by the power of Latin Christendom. Had a concerted effort been made against them at this time, they would undoubtedly have been crushed.<sup>2</sup>

The church, again, remained throughout for Luther the church of faith. It can be seen only with the blind eyes of faith (mit blinden augen ... mit dem glauben).<sup>3</sup> For the church is only to be found where Christ is, and Christ is God's revelation veiled under the Cross. The church similarly is

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon 1535, in LW 41,116

<sup>2</sup> See Ranke, op cit, III,336

<sup>3</sup> Sermon 1534, in LW 37,538

veiled in history until the end. Then the invisible will become visible, as in the case of the widow's son in Scripture. She does not see him living, but only dead. But Christ sees him alive and brings him back to life out of death itself, and so makes of the invisible thing a visible thing!<sup>1</sup>

At present, Christ reigns by faith in his Word. His church believe the Word, lying enigmatic and obscure under Baptism (pro aenigmata et obscuro verbo per baptismum), that they are sons of God, and victorious over sin and the Devil. But at the end all will be revealed. He likens the invisible Kingdom to a coin in a purse, which is at last drawn out and openly displayed (Gleich wie ein gülden ynn einem beutel odder tasschen ist ein rechter gulden und bleibt eben der selbige, wenn ich in erfur zihe und jnn der hand habe, on das er nu nicht mehr verborgen ist).<sup>2</sup> The church, moreover, is at present holy, but not in itself, in Christ. It is a holiness begun here and fulfilled in the world to come; a faith in eternal life through the Word, realised in eternal life in the world to come. The Kingdom of God, thus, is dupliciter,<sup>3</sup> now, but not yet. It is never a part of the world that is passing away. It is not a visible bodily Kingdom (visibile, leiblich regnum). For the sichtbar ist zeitlich. It is the schema mundi which must pass away with the present age,<sup>4</sup> leaving the externa structura,<sup>5</sup> that kingdom of

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<sup>1</sup> LW 37,538

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 1532, in LW 36,570-1, 569

<sup>3</sup> Sermon on the Catechism 1528, in LW 30/1,100

<sup>4</sup> Sermon 1531, in LW 34/1,176

<sup>5</sup> Vorlesung über Jesaias 1527-30, in LW 31/2,550



faith, in comparison with which the other is simply a larva or mask.<sup>1</sup>

Luther went to great lengths to make clear that Christ's Kingdom was something quite different from the Old Testament theocracy, and from all kingdoms ruled by law. It is apart and above all laws, and is not even bound by the ten commandments. (Ideo sollen wir in Ecclesia kein gebot etc. sic das sünde sey, Quod die braut zur kirchen führen. In Ecclesia sollen wir kein gebot leiden, non 10 praecepta, quae tamen, sol uns nicht binden).<sup>2</sup>

Can this general view of Christenheit be made more precise in terms of the church as it appears in the ordinary congregation? Luther considered Christenheit as based not only on the preached Word (Das gott Mensch worden, gestorben und wider erstanden ist),<sup>3</sup> but conjointly with the sacraments, and therefore implying an ordered institution. Mt. 18<sup>20</sup> is interpreted along these lines (Wo das Euangelion recht vnd rein gepredigt wird, da mus eine heilige Christliche kirche sein, ... Wo aber eine heilige Christliche kirche ist, da müssen alle sacrament sein. ... da er spricht, 'Wo zween oder drey ...').<sup>4</sup>

The church in this sense was among the Galatians, for they, according to Luther, had the Word, baptism and the sacrament, despite grave moral shortcomings. But he denied that the

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<sup>1</sup> On Gal 3<sup>28</sup> in LW XXXI, 304

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 1539, in LW 47, 815

<sup>4</sup> Von der Winkelmesse und Pfaffenweihe, 1533, in LW 38, 252

<sup>3</sup> Sermon 1526, Ex 3<sup>1-6</sup>, in LW 20, 361



church was among the Anabaptists since they denied the sacrament of infant baptism, and the control of the Spirit by the Word. The church exists under the Pope despite his impiety, because wherever baptism is, there is also the church.<sup>1</sup> It might be questioned whether the exclusion of the Anabaptists and the inclusion of the Galatians was not a little forced. It may be doubted whether the Galatians, at the time of Paul's epistle, really had the Word as Luther conceived it.

What is clear, however, is that for Luther, the Word is never disembodied. It is logos not ratio. The logos was the Word of God in Christ's historical body; now the Word is embodied in the geistlich body, the church,<sup>2</sup> which also itself lives in a natural body. To possess Christ, therefore, is only possible in a "bodily" context of the preached Word and the sacraments. It is the conjunction of the Word, Spirit and faith with the external, fleshly, and bodily thing that makes it geistlich and unsichtbar. (... alle das ienige, so unser leib euserlich und leiblich thut: wenn Gotts wort dazu kompt und durch den glauben geschicht, so ists und heisst geistlich geschehen. ... Es sey sehen, hören, reden, greiffen, geberen, tragen, essen, trincken odder was es wölle).<sup>3</sup> Hence only that act performed in faith is of any use. If a person helps his neighbour, and does it in a

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 1<sup>2</sup>, (1531) 1535, in LW 40/1,71

<sup>2</sup> See Kattenbusch, op cit, 210 n 1

<sup>3</sup> Dass diese Wort Christi "Das ist mein Leib" noch fest stehen, 1527, in LW 23,189

purely leiblich way. it is no use at all. (Denn fleisch ist kein nütze). But if he does this in a geistlich way, if he does it from the heart out of faith in the Word of God, then it is real life and blessedness (so ists leben und selickeit).<sup>1</sup> This was why he rejected the visible legal structure of the Papacy, as purely weltlich (ein lauter geistlich, ia ein weltlich regiment).<sup>2</sup> It was an external thing without the Word of God (Eusserlich ding on Gotts wort).<sup>3</sup>

Hence the church was simply the community of those who held fast to the Word, and who were by the Word made geistlich and unsichtbar. In this sense, said Luther, even a seven year old child knew what the church was, namely, the believers, the sheep who listen for the voice of their shepherd. When the children say according to the Creed, I <sup>e</sup>believe in the holy Christian church, they understand that holiness is not in externals, but in the Word of God, and in real faith.<sup>4</sup> H. Bornkamm remarks with some truth that scholars, who have long wrestled with Luther's view of the church, are somewhat jealous of, or doubtful about this seven year old!<sup>5</sup> But it is true none the less that as he says, we are here at the centre of Luther's understanding of the church.

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<sup>1</sup> LW 23,189

<sup>2</sup> Exposition of Ps 117, 1530, in LW 31,242

<sup>3</sup> LW 23,263

<sup>4</sup> Die Schmalkaldischen Artikel 1537.8, in LW 50,249-50

<sup>5</sup> Luthers Geistige Welt, Lüneburg, Heliand, 1947, 133

There remains, however, a difficulty concerning the nature of Christenheit as communio and as a real community. The former is a worldwide entity, the gemeyne und zal odder versamlunge of all Christians in the whole world, the Bride and Body of Christ.<sup>1</sup> This refers to the communio sanctorum, whose members have no necessarily actual community. And yet Luther also spoke of Christenheit as a community which share their diverse gifts in mutual love. This suggests an actual socio-ethical community. But this did not exist save in the mediaeval idea of Christenheit. The unity of Christenheit is geistlich in Christ, not leiblich (versamlet geistlich ynn einem Euangelio und glauben unter ein heupt, das Jhesus Christus ist).<sup>2</sup> But the geistlich versamlung is not in the same category as the geistlich versamlung that is the congregation. For the latter is leiblich as community, to which the Word is added which makes the leiblich community geistlich. But there is nothing leiblich out of which world Christenheit is formed. I.e. the communio of Christenheit is not also an outward community such as he longed for locally in the Wittenberg versamlung.

Luther at various times sought to make all this clearer by redefining the term church. The true church is above all the communio sanctorum. In German, this means a versamlunge, or gemeine, but not a gemeinschaft, presumably in the sense of an external Kultgemeinde or natural association. The word Kirche, he was not happy with, for it is used more in the

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<sup>1</sup> Vom Abendmahl Christi. Bekenntnis, 1528, in LW 26,506

<sup>2</sup> LW 26,506

sense of a church building. He was concerned rather with the church as hauffe, which alone makes the building a church (gemeine, samlung or ekklesia). The clearest expression of all he found, is Christenheit<sup>1</sup> which expresses the communio idea independently of the legal constitutional structure. But he used the term also for a local group as at Wittenberg. The church at Wittenberg is the Wittenbergische hauffe, or versamlung, or die heilige gemeine Christenheit. Christenheit is a communio of all believers, present at Wittenberg and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

Luther had something to say about the distribution of Christenheit. Its members are present in the nominal, external church of the Papacy. There, the false members are in openness, and the true members of Christenheit are in concealment. This is because the Word is subverted, and only baptism remains. In the hidden truly constituted church of the evangelicals, on the other hand, where the Word is openly preached, and the sacraments administered in their purity, the true members are in the openness of their confession, while the false members are concealed under the same formal confession.<sup>3</sup>

Christenheit as a universal communio of the invisible Christ, consists of a part hidden deeply under the false church, and emerging into<sup>the</sup> open in the reformed congregations where Word and sacrament are pure and open. But in the latter the members individually are not recog-

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<sup>1</sup> Deudsch Catechismus, 1529, in LW 30/1,189

<sup>2</sup> LW 31,92

<sup>3</sup> See Expositions and Sermons 1538-9, on Jn 16<sup>3</sup>, in LW 46,29

nisable, partly because mingled with false Christians, and partly because even the faith of the true Christians is masked under the outer person (larva).

It is perhaps difficult to require from Luther, at least before his last and more settled years, a completely lucid statement of the nature of the church of faith as Christenheit or communio, in relation to the community of Christians. For Luther's view was above all a prophetic one. Luther began as an individual prophet of the Word. His commentary on John 16<sup>1-2</sup> (1 where Christ predicts that his disciples will be excommunicated and killed, by those who imagine they are doing God's will, gives a good illustration. Jeremiah was banned by the church in his day. Yet a fire burned in his bones. So the Christian has to speak the word of God. The church in Jeremiah's day said they were the chosen people, whom God would not condemn. Hence all prophets inevitably have to contend with the name and prestige of the church. The Pope claimed to be the church, with sacraments, and Scriptures and apostolicity. Do we add to these - faith and the Holy Spirit, and fall silent? The justification for resistance, and for a prophetic statement of the Word is in Romans 9. Not all born in Israel are children of Abraham. There comes a time when those flouting God's law and promises cease to be God's people. God reverses the position. The church becomes the Not-church; the Not-church becomes the true church.

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<sup>1</sup> LW 46,6ff



The problem is to distinguish between the title (Namen) and the reality (Wesen). You ask the Papists the following:

"Gleubet yr auch an Christum, das jr allein durch sein blut vergebung der sunden habt und selig werdet, Und das dis ist Gottes des Vaters wille, und jr darauff getaufft seid und das Sacrament empfaht und wartet des ewigen lebens?" (1

They answer, Yes. So you ask further: why teach that baptism is lost and replaced by good works, that Christ died for the inherited sin alone? Why the obsession with monastic orders, and intercession for saints? Why turn Christ into a judge only and not see him also as a redeemer? The Roman Church has, in fact, despite its protestations jettisoned Christ. Hence their excommunication is the Devil's, not Christ's, and the church is Israel after the flesh. Rome is the Namenkirche. The Wesenskirche is where the pure Word of Christ, and the receiving of him only through the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. It is Christenheit, as widely scattered as the world. Aber inn dem stück komen sie zusammen; but in this matter they are united.<sup>2</sup> Christenheit, though bodily scattered, forms a single communio confessing the same Creed, with the single Word and sacrament. Each member fulfils his Beruf as father, mother, lord, or servant. Luther conceived of Christenheit as wider than himself and his party. "Was wir predigen, gleuben und leben, also predigen, gleuben und leben sie auch!"<sup>3</sup> The reality and content of the faith is the common bond. Those in Christenheit are bodily separated (leiblich von einander gescheiden)<sup>4</sup> but one in Christ. This

<sup>1</sup> LW 46,8

<sup>2</sup> LW 46,10-11

<sup>3</sup> LW 46,10

<sup>4</sup> LW 46,10



is the true church.

Pauck reproaches Luther because while Luther's conception of the Word implied differences in the understanding of it, and formulation of it, Luther refused to allow these differences. In the above justification of his separation from the Roman church it is clear that had not Luther's formulation been quite sharp and uncompromising, he could never have separated out the truth of the Gospel from the mass of accretions. Nor could he have freed Christenheit from the Roman ecclesiastical institution. But it was necessary that world-wide Christenheit, united in spirit and faith had to become a community of love and faith, as Luther and his party were. Otherwise it remained simply as an idea.

Ranke observes that the rights of restoring order and of reformation were vested in the individual states, and that the churches were not constituted from below. "Nor", he adds, "had that community of true believers answering to the idea of the invisible church, to which the right of giving laws to themselves might have been committed, any actual existence."<sup>1</sup> Christenheit as the Body of Christ, has, of course, a reality derived from the reality of Christ. But the communio must be embodied in some human community with some form of order and rule.

At one point in this period, the line of constitutional endeavour intersects with his view of the church as the invisible and believing body: this was <sup>in</sup> the introduction

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<sup>1</sup> Ranke, op cit, 494

to the Deutsche Messe, 1526, where Luther showed that he wanted to form a definite community with regular discipline. He had no desire to set up an Anabaptist ecclesiola but he did wish to go further than just having a loose gathering about the Word and sacraments, where Christenheit is present but also not in the form of a socio<sup>6</sup>ethical ordered community. This desire, expressed also in 1523, in the sermon quoted above, was never realised. He said he had not the personal<sup>ne</sup> for it, i.e. not sufficient real Christians. What he also lacked was the opportunity, the means, and the ability, perhaps, to form this community such that the evangelical groups might become communities based on Word and sacrament, with a clear independent existence over against, if necessary, the political structure.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly the alternative path was followed and worked out, of groups under the Word, in which the unified authority was provided by the State.

The true form of evangelical order, he said in the introduction to the Deutsche Messe,<sup>2</sup> is not so open and indiscriminate. It is for those confessing their faith and wishing to realise it in action. They will, under it, assemble in a place apart as a community, for prayer, reading of Scripture, the sacraments, and for work among the poor and sick. Such a gemeyne or versamlunge, however, is at present unrealisable, for there were not sufficient people to form it.

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<sup>1</sup> Only in the years after 1933 did this possibility become real in Germany. See Bellardi, Die Geschichte der "Christlichen Gemeinschaft" in Strassburg, Leipzig, Heinsius, 1934, VII

<sup>2</sup> LW 19,75

Similarly, in the course of a conversation with Caspar Schwenkfeld, the Anabaptist, he stated <sup>1</sup> that he would like to preach to the real Christians (of whom a register would be made) in the Cloister, while the others would assemble under the other minister in the Chapel. But again he said that the real Christians were few, in fact, he did not know of any! The interesting thing is the weight Luther put on having true Christians for his disciplined socio-ethical community. It was not a desire to separate the "first class" Christians from the rest for the sake of purity.<sup>2</sup> Otherwise, Luther would have been in accord with Schwenkfeld's plan for a visible society of the saints. It was rather, an attempt to feel his way towards an expression of Christenheit in a socio-ethical community. But his refusal to lay down a definite order and discipline, made such a community possible only if the true Christians came forward fully fledged. That this is thought possible, is shown by his statement that those who are already Christians, do not need the first two orders of worship, because they have their service of God in the Spirit (Gottesdienst im Geist).<sup>3</sup> The first two orders of worship are for those who are not yet Christian, or who are on the way.<sup>4</sup> He does not, seemingly, consider that the disciplined socio-ethical

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Kolde, in Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte, XIII (1893), no 4, 554-5

<sup>2</sup> See Koestlin, Geschichte des christlichen Gottesdienstes, Freiburg, JCB Mohr, 1887, 155-6

<sup>3</sup> LW 19,73

<sup>4</sup> LW 19,73

community could be instituted for those who are, if not true Christians, at least on the way to becoming so.

He therefore turned to the looser gathering which was no ordered and definite community (keyne geordente und gewisse versamlunge),<sup>1</sup> and concentrated on a pedagogical approach.<sup>2</sup> The Christians in these loose gatherings are scattered about everywhere, under good and bad political authorities.<sup>3</sup> They pursue their callings in the three spheres of family, worship and the State,<sup>4</sup> where Christenheit is being realised in a diffused outward way. It is true that as a result of the visitation, he hoped that disciplined communities (Sammlunge der Christen) might be formed within the open parish gathering (where Christian and non-Christian are together), but this did not happen, and Luther did not force it.<sup>5</sup>

By 1537-8, he was satisfied, apparently, with the new arrangements, as being the best possible. His evangelical movement had no need of a reforming council because its churches were endued through God's grace with the pure Word and the right use of the sacrament, and nothing better could be expected, or hoped for from a council.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> LW 19,74

<sup>2</sup> Koestlin, op cit, 153-4

<sup>3</sup> Vom Kriege wider die Türken, 1529, in LW 30/2,117

<sup>4</sup> Vom Abendmahl Christi: Bekenntnis, 1528, in LW 26,504-5

<sup>5</sup> See Luther to Nikolaus Hausmann, 29 Mar 1527 in LW (Briefe) 4,180-1

<sup>6</sup> Die Schmalkaldischen Artikel, 1537-8, in LW 50,195

## VI. THE MATURE VIEW OF LUTHER FROM WITHIN HIS

LANDESKIRCHE (1539-47)

The principal writings on the nature of the church during this period are Von den Konziliis und Kirchen, 1539, and Wider Hans Worst, 1541. There are also noteworthy references to it in the Promotion Disputation of Johannes Macchabaeus Scotus, 1542, in the big Genesis Commentary, 1535-45, and in sermons and miscellaneous writings.

In the third part of Von den Konziliis und Kirchen, Luther reaffirmed the church to be essentially the Gemeinschaft der Heiligen, a communio of all who believe in Christ and who are sanctified by the Spirit.<sup>1</sup> He described the communio as a hauffe or semlung or Volck,<sup>2</sup> but its coherence is only that of the universal Christenheit. Though it is of the same order as the church of Pentecost, it is nevertheless not a community in the same sense, for it spans the whole of time until the end of the world.<sup>3</sup> Its name is common to all churches, hence its catholicity,<sup>4</sup> but the Roman Pope and priesthood, in as much as they do not rightly believe in Christ, are no longer a part of it.<sup>5</sup> The church as a communio of believers in Christ is thought of after the Pauline image in Ephesians 5<sup>32</sup>:

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1 LW 50,624

2 LW 50,624

3 LW 50,625

4 LW 50,626

5 LW 50,625



Christus und die Kirche ist ein leib, wie Man und weib,  
Aber es ist gros geheimnis und mus mit dem glauben be-  
griffen werden, Es lesst sich nicht sehen, noch greiffen,  
darumb ists ein Sacrament, das heist ein heimlich ding,  
mysterium, unsichtbarlich verborgen. (1

While thus affirming as before the church as an in-  
visible communio, or Christenheit, Luther was more concerned  
to set down signs whereby its presence may be recognised.  
These signs are visible for the "poor erring man" in this  
world who lives in faith and hope of the perfect world to  
come.<sup>2</sup> They are therefore signs of a reality which is both  
present and yet not yet come in openness or fulfilment.

The first and the chief one is the external Word,  
preached by men "such as you and I". The Word as sign is not  
limited to preaching, but includes its being seriously be-  
lieved and openly confessed. It is sufficient of itself to  
mark the presence of the Christian "Volck". For it is the  
Word that drives out the Devil with "outcries and tumult",  
and establishes the rule of Christ in the hearts of men.<sup>3</sup>

The second and third are baptism and the Eucharist.  
Baptism is a sign, where it is truly taught, believed, and  
practised according to the institution of Christ. Its valid-  
ity is established in God and is irrespective of who it is  
that baptises.<sup>4</sup> The sacrament of the Altar is a sign and  
"Heiltum", left by Christ for the sanctification of his  
volk, where it is administered after the institution of  
Christ, and is truly believed and received. Its validity  
too is not affected by the spiritual state of the dispenser.

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<sup>1</sup> LW 50,641

<sup>2</sup> LW 50,628

<sup>3</sup> LW 50,628-30

<sup>4</sup> LW 50,630-1

The presence of false and unbelieving Christians also does not harm the sanctifying of the volk unless it becomes open, when the church must take steps to purify its membership.<sup>1</sup>

The next three concern the ordering and liturgy of the church, now definitely thought of in terms of the institution, or congregation, Kultgemeinde: the public and private employment of the Keys i.e. the power of binding and loosing. This power, however, belongs to the volck Christi the whole world over, wherever Christians are to be found.<sup>2</sup> Then, these first four Heilthümer, or means of salvation, require the office of ministers. The church cannot exist without those who carry on the work of the evangelists, apostles and prophets.<sup>3</sup> A sixth sign of the presence of Christenheit is prayer, praise and thanksgiving to God: These include the singing of Psalms and Hymns, repeating the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, Commandments and Catechism, etc.<sup>4</sup>

The last Heilthum is the "Holy Cross".<sup>5</sup> This is hardship, and persecution by the world, the flesh and the Devil; the inward and outward misery and deprivation that results from following Christ. It is the endurance of bitter hatred, of being put to death as a heretic.

"Kein volck auff erden mus solchen bitteren hass leiden, sie müssen erger, denn Jüden, Heiden, Türcken, Summa, sie müssen Ketzler, Buben, Teuffel, verflucht und die schedlichsten Leute auff Erden heissen, das auch die einen Gotts dienst thun, von welchen sie erhenckt, er-trenckt, ermordet, gemartert, veriagt, zeplagt werden, und sich niemend uber sie erbarme." (6

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<sup>1</sup> LW 50,631

<sup>2</sup> LW 50,632

<sup>3</sup> LW 50,633-40

<sup>4</sup> LW 50,641

<sup>5</sup> LW 50,642

<sup>6</sup> LW 50,642

Where the Cross is, in this sense, there is real Christenheit. This strongly held view was retained by Luther even after his own movement had triumphed in a large section of Germany, and political and personal insecurity was greatly lessened. It seems to have been partly a genuine New Testament recovery, and partly exasperation and rhetoric.

In addition to the seven signs Luther suggested that there are more external signs by which we recognise the church, since by them the spirit sanctifies the whole sphere of life designated by the second table of the Decalogue.<sup>1</sup> He also warned that the Devil has his imitations of the signs. The latter is even more fitted out with sacraments, priests, chapels, numbers, and sanctity, etc.<sup>2</sup> But all this apparatus serves men only in this life. Christ's sacraments are directed towards the creation of an invisible being in the Spirit (unsichtbarlich wesen, im geist).<sup>3</sup>

The view of the church expressed here, is Luther's conception of Christenheit in relation to its visibility. The communio of the believers in Christ is signalled by various more or less institutional signs widening out towards the whole range of society. No longer is there the same emphasis upon the gathering of believers around the Word, or the concern with individual communities of believers. Though there is the same recognition of the church as the communio of believers in Christ deriving its reality from him. But then, this communio is conceived of

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<sup>1</sup> LW 50,643

<sup>2</sup> LW 50,645

<sup>3</sup> LW 50,646

as present wherever signs of it appear in society. The whole of society thus becomes the field of operation or the natural community, the leib, for the communio. There are three hierarchies that go to make up the natural community: family, political organisation, and the church (in the narrow sense as Kultgemeinde):

"Das erst ist Haushalten, daraus komen Leute. Das ander ist Stad regirn ... Das ist alles geben, kind, gut, gelt, thier. ... Darnach kömpt das dritte, Gottes eigen Haus und Stad, das ist die Kirche, die mus aus dem Hause Personen, aus der Stad schutz und schirm haben. Das sind drey Jerarchien, von Gott geordent, und dürffen keiner mehr, haben auch gnug und uber gnug zu thun, das wir in diesen dreien recht leben und wider den Teuffel." (1

Hitherto the Pope had asserted his own overarching authority over these hierarchies. But this authority was only a mask or larva, a worldly substitute for the real authority of Christ over his communio.<sup>2</sup>

Kattenbusch has described Luther's twofold understanding of communio as religious reality and as social reality by the term Doppelschichtigkeit.<sup>3</sup> But the idea of the double stratum is more static than Luther probably intended. Also it relegates the church, in the narrow sense as Kultgemeinde, to a position of insignificance, as a community. Perhaps, Luther intended this. For he makes no reference to the Kultgemeinden in their organisation under the Landeskirche. Nor is there any suggestion that they are part of a community or a "church" that exists in a different sense

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<sup>1</sup> LW 50,652

<sup>2</sup> LW 50,653

<sup>3</sup> Op cit, 332f, Kattenbusch's interpretation, however, has not gone unchallenged by Swedish theologians. See Törnwall, Geistliches und weltliches Regiment bei Luther, München, Chr. Kaiser, 1947, 26 n 37

than that of society in general. The communio / Landeskirche is the idea of Christenheit worked out to its final form. The line at which the former emerges into visibility are the objective signs of Word, sacraments and all the others. But these are bare of any embodiment in a socio-ethical community which is directly related to the Landeskirche constitution.<sup>1</sup>

Two years later, Luther had occasion to answer the accusation of Henry of Brunswick, a Roman catholic, that the Kurfürst of Saxony was outside the church, and that the Saxons were heretics.<sup>2</sup> In Wider Hans Worst, he began with the assumption, drawn from Augustine, that there are zweierlei Kirchen the true and the false, throughout all history.<sup>3</sup> The question is whose church, Luther's or the Pope's, is the true one. The true church is always persecuted and attacked by the Devil.<sup>4</sup> But, more objective, the true church is that which stands in a direct line with the early church. Now, said Luther, the Saxon Landeskirche has baptism, eucharist, the Keys, the office of preaching, and God's Word, the Creed, the Lord's prayer, the honouring of political authority, and of the marriage ordinance, fellowship in suffering with the early church, and open prayer for its enemies: all as in the early church.<sup>5</sup> Hence in the Lutheran church, the early church shines out again.

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<sup>1</sup> See Rade, op cit, 244-6

<sup>2</sup> Wider Hans Worst, 1541, in LW 51,476-7

<sup>3</sup> LW 51,477

<sup>4</sup> LW 51,474

<sup>5</sup> LW 51,479-86



"Denn die vorige alte kirche leuchtet wider her fur (wie die sonne nach den wolcken hinder welchen sie doch die selb sonne war, aber nicht helle)." (1

On the other hand, the Roman Church has made many innovations: the effect of baptism is supposed to have been impaired by sin, so satisfaction and good works are introduced. Indulgences take its place, along with holy water and salt. Pilgrimages and brotherhoods are introduced. Innovations are made in the sacrament (communion in one kind; it becomes a human work, and the priest sacrifices). External things become sins. Preaching is not "at the command" of Christ. A leiblich heubt has been substituted in the geistlich Reich for Christ himself. Saints are worshipped. Marriage is degraded. The church has taken up the sword. Purgatory is introduced.<sup>2</sup> All these things are a departure from the early church. The conclusion is that Luther's church must be the true church (sind wir gewislich die rechte alte kirche, on alle hurerey vnd newerey, die bis auff vns daher blieben vnd wir aus der selben komen, ja widerumb auffs new von yhr geboren sind).<sup>3</sup>

The Roman Church is become Babylon. It is time, therefore, to heed the voice of the Angel, gehet heraus von Babylon mein volck, das jr nicht teilhafftig werdet jrer sünden.

(Rev. 18<sup>4</sup>)<sup>4</sup> What then is Rome? It has fallen away from the true church. It has baptism. But after seven to eight years old, the baptised go astray instead of being under Christ. The Roman Church is descended from the early church, it remains

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<sup>1</sup> LW 51,486

<sup>2</sup> LW 51,487-98

<sup>3</sup> LW 51,498

<sup>4</sup> LW 51,499

in the true church, and may even rule it, but it is no more a part of it. A few of its members (gar wenig) remain to the end under Christ, as in the Old Testament a remnant of 7.000 is preserved, and at one point all except Joshua and Caleb perish.<sup>1</sup>

This is the time of Antichrist, the whole Hauf is subjected to the wrath of God, error flourishes, and the rulers of the Church of Rome no longer know what the church is.<sup>2</sup>

It is deeply hidden under human teaching and ceremonies and robes.<sup>3</sup>

To it belong "naked children" and people with no such vestments to put on. This is the invisible true church. Es ist ein hoch tieff verborgen ding die Kirche, das sie niemand kennen noch sehen mag, Sondern allein an der Tauffe, Sacrament und Wort fassen und gleuben mus.<sup>4</sup>

The Papists identify God's Word with human teaching.<sup>5</sup>

But the true church has only God's Word.<sup>6</sup> Luther's church has God's Word. Therefore it is the true church. It has all that belongs to the true church and the property of the church therefore belongs to it.<sup>7</sup>

It is true that in the Saxon Church many bad people remain. The peasant goes wild, the townsman is mean, and the nobleman greedy. (Also ist bey uns auch fleisch und blut, ja der Teufel unter Hiobs kindern, der Baur ist wild, Burger Geitzet, Adel kratzt).<sup>8</sup>

From this writing it is evident that for Luther the evangelicals were the true church, and that the true church

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<sup>1</sup> LW 51,506

<sup>2</sup> LW 51,506

<sup>3</sup> LW 51,508

<sup>4</sup> LW 51,507

<sup>5</sup> LW 51,508

<sup>6</sup> LW 51,513

<sup>7</sup> LW 51,549

<sup>8</sup> LW 51,536

is a Volksgemeinschaft. The church is the area where the Word and sacraments have free play. All are baptised, many fall away: they enter the church by divine incorporation into the Volksgemeinschaft, but they can by their sin, become dead members. The Saxon church is not a narrow community of believers, but a reformed Volkskirche. The Word, purified and restored, rules in place of the Pope. The political authority, as a baptised member of the church, helps to ensure that the Word has freedom.<sup>1</sup>

In the Wider Hans Worst, the sharp polemical tone reveals a further shifting of emphasis from communio to Landeskirche. Membership in the church is defined more negatively than positively. The communion of saints comprises all the baptised who have not fallen away, or who are not false believers. Not faith but unbelief is decisive.<sup>2</sup> Again, the true church is now not so much a communio as an object of faith, but the Landeskirche, where the Word is purely preached and the true doctrine taught. The contrast is between two institutional churches, the false one of Rome and the true one of Saxony.

As in the Von den Konziliis und Kirchen, there is no suggestion that the church in the narrow sense as Kultgemeinden, has a socio-ethical character as a community. The communio sanctorum works itself out, deeply hidden, in

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<sup>1</sup> See Foerster, "Fragen zu Luthers Kirchenbegriff aus der Gedankenwelt seines Alters", in Festgabe für Julius Kaftan, Tübingen, JCB Mohr, 1920, 92ff

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 99

the whole structure of society. Luther makes no move towards a community as a leaven within the lump of society as a whole. It was not indeed that the social and ethical were unimportant. It was rather that they were never to be accorded an independent or primary value. They followed the activity of the Word, they were not integral to its action.

It was this basic conviction of Luther's that weakened the constitution of the evangelical churches upon the New Testament form, which included the socio-ethical community. Hence, the only other available framework for the church was that of society as a whole, the political one. This freed the church from the spiritual rule of Rome, but exposed it to the political rule of the State. The result was something approaching another visible church set over against the false visible Church of Rome. The communio of believers, an invisible object of faith, remains, but into a more prominent place come objective "goods" or means of salvation, and the concern with pure doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

There remains only to draw together the more fragmentary teaching on the nature of the church in other works not primarily dealing with the church. In 1542, Luther was the "promoter" of a doctoral disputation concerning the opposition of catholic and evangelical views of the church. In the course of it he had the opportunity to deal with the visibility and invisibility of the church, and to define the proper sense in which succession exists in the church. The theses were drawn up by Melancthon.<sup>2</sup> And his

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<sup>1</sup> See R. Seeberg, Dogmengeschichte, IV/1, 299-307; and Foerster, op cit, 99-102

<sup>2</sup> LW 39/2, 145

phraseology is evident in the thesis on the nature of the church as ecclesia visibilis.

"Ecclesia visibilis est coetus sanctorum, cui multi hypocritae admixti sunt, de vera doctrina tamen consentientes, habens externas notas, professionem purae doctrinae Evangelii et legitimum usum sacramentorum." (1)

The church, however, is not a human polity (humana politia) bound to a certain succession. It has no canon law and hierarchy, power and pomp. It is rather a scattered body (corpus dispersum), extending over the whole earth, without an external head, without power, and with no splendid hierarchy.<sup>2</sup>

Luther in his comments said that the church was a congregation (congregatio) undiscernible except to him to whom the Spirit revealed it. It was in the flesh and appeared visibly in the world (in carne, visibilis in mundo), and yet it was not itself world (mundus), and no one saw it!<sup>3</sup> It was visible, he said, through the confessions of the believers (propter confessionem). Then he added that the church was involved in the flesh (involuta in carne), though it was not flesh, nor lived after the flesh. It was similarly in persons but was not persons. In so far, therefore, as the church was in the flesh, in the world, and in persons, it was visible (visibilis); but this visibility reached only as far as the visibility of open confession (ex confessione).<sup>4</sup>

The church has always existed, he continued, but it has not always been visible (visibilis). The external signs of the church, baptism and the sacrament of the altar, were

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1 LW 39/2,146

2 LW 39/2,147

3 LW 39/2,149

4 LW 39,161



miraculously preserved in the church of the Papists.<sup>1</sup> The real church was, and always will be hidden under its adversaries: the Turks, the Papists and the Demons!<sup>2</sup>

Succession in the church is exclusively bound up with the Gospel. If a bishop teaches against it he is to be shunned as a false prophet. Ubi est verbum, ibi est Ecclesia.<sup>3</sup>

It is not possible to put weight on the views of Luther in this Disputation. He is using Melanchthon's theses and to some extent, also, his terminology. What comes out rather more clearly than usual is the visibility of the church in the confession of the Word, and its being involved in bodily form in the world. E. Rietschel emphasises from this writing, that the church is visible to believers in the confession of others, and is not absolutely invisible except to an act of pure faith, as Althaus prefers.<sup>4</sup>

In the Genesis commentary, 1535-45, the concern with the unending conflict between the hidden, true church, and the open false church emerges into a dominant position. Under Rome the church as men know it is conceived in a unified sense. With Luther this becomes impossible.<sup>5</sup> The "church" in the world is divided. One part has the title, but is the hypocritical church (ecclesia hypocritica), the other is sterilis, desolata, and subject to the Cross and suffering.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> LW 39,167-8

<sup>2</sup> LW 39,183-4

<sup>3</sup> LW 39,176

<sup>4</sup> E. Rietschel, Das Problem der unsichtbar-sichtbaren Kirche bei Luther, 65

<sup>5</sup> cf E Seeberg, Luthers Theologie II, 445

<sup>6</sup> LW 42,187

The church of Abel is always persecuted by that of Cain, not only with false doctrine, but by sword and tyranny.<sup>1</sup> It is thus in conformity with Christ's life on earth: excommunicated, and held as a heretic.<sup>2</sup> Luther made a further contrast between the church of Esau, and the church of Jacob. These two are not separated, but mixed. In Luther's own church usurers, Papists, heretics and sectarians are living - the weeds among the wheat.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, the true church is present not in any external form, but in the various signs, chief of which is the Word.<sup>4</sup> Without this only the title remains.<sup>5</sup> Wherever they are, there is the church in the midst of Turks, Papacy or Hell itself.<sup>6</sup> Luther was quite confident that his church is the church of Abel, the Pope's that of Cain. (Nullum igitur apud nos hodie est dubium, quin Papae Ecclesia sit Cainica. Nos autem sumus vera Ecclesia).<sup>7</sup> The church at Wittenberg has the true teaching and ministry, its body is sound despite certain blemishes and defects, per Synecdochen.<sup>8</sup> But the church under Rome is that of a totally false body. The true church has the hiddenly wicked (occulte impii), but these do not act against it. The Papists expressly (ex professo) oppose the church, and oppress the true doctrine; while the true church has nominal and real (numero et merito) members.<sup>9</sup> The whole emphasis here is on true doctrine as distinguishing the true from the false church.

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<sup>1</sup> LW 42,412-3

<sup>2</sup> LW 42,187

<sup>3</sup> LW 44,23

<sup>4</sup> LW 44,111

<sup>5</sup> LW 42,424

<sup>6</sup> LW 43,597

<sup>7</sup> LW 42,188

<sup>8</sup> LW 44,25

<sup>9</sup> LW 43,428-9

Luther refer<sup>ed</sup>, also many times to the analysis of societies into three hierarchies. The church of Esau, always arrogates to itself a universality of rule that only belongs to the church of Jacob.<sup>1</sup>

Lastly, in the sermons of Luther's later years, may be found not only the emphasis of these years, but also the ideas which took their rise in his early period. The church is, as before, the Kingdom of Christ. It began in Paradise and will last until the Day of Judgment.<sup>2</sup> It is a small and weak little group over against the world in numbers and power (perhaps this is a more pessimistic view than in the earlier days). It is the special Volk of God. Luther retained the idea of the church as communio ruled by Christ, and maintained through all anfechtung, suffering and weakness. It is scattered throughout the world, and is without the well-ordered constitutional arrangement that human ingenuity can devise.<sup>3</sup> It is a spiritual kingdom (geistlich Reich) because ruled by the Spirit of Christ invisibly, through the Word alone.<sup>4</sup> It is thus an object<sup>of</sup> faith, to be believed, not seen. And like the Cross, it is "covered" and discloses itself only to faith.<sup>5</sup> This God does deliberately so that it may not become an external affair, but a kingdom

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<sup>1</sup> See Kattenbusch, op cit, 338-9; LW 43,524.504.499

<sup>2</sup> Bibel- und Bucheinzeichnungen Luthers, Sprüche aus dem AT, Ps 145,13 in LW 48,84

<sup>3</sup> On 1 Cor 10<sup>6-13</sup>, Sommerpostille 1544, in LW 22,165-6

<sup>4</sup> On Jn 16<sup>5-15</sup>, Sommerpostille 1544, in LW 21,354

<sup>5</sup> Tischreden, LWE 60,381

in men's hearts, with power over sin, and death and Hell by the Word of reconciliation.<sup>1</sup>

It is impossible for there to be a visible head over this invisible kingdom.<sup>2</sup> It is also impossible that the church should be made up of the accidental and external things (larua, persona, testa, putamine, et vestitu). Christ is the reality and the substance of the church.<sup>3</sup> And he rules, preserves, increases his church using persons and institutions as his larvae. In this way the whole world actually serves the purpose of God, and world history, is in the last analysis, "church history".<sup>4</sup>

Luther makes the sharpest distinction between the external larva and the reality deriving from the redemptive action of God in Christ. The first if pursued, leads to a false, external church according to human reason, the latter to the true church based on the right understanding of Christ and the relegation of external office, power, and authority to a subordinate place.<sup>5</sup> The true church, therefore, is not bound to a constitutional succession, or rule of bishops, it is a spiritual gathering (geistliche Versammlung) of Christ, recognised by Word and sacrament outwardly,

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<sup>1</sup> On Lu 24<sup>13-35</sup>, Sommerpostille 1544, in LW 21,221

<sup>2</sup> Die Zirkulardisputation über Mt 19<sup>21</sup>, 1539, in LW 39/2,89

<sup>3</sup> To Amsdorf, 1542, in Enders 14,175

<sup>4</sup> cf E Seeberg, Luthers Theologie II, 445

<sup>5</sup> On Jn 15<sup>26-7</sup>.16<sup>1-4</sup>, Sommerpostille, in LW 21,432

and inwardly by faith. It corresponds to the church at the time of Christ and the Apostles, which was outside of, and against the constitutional authority of the entire priesthood, and was based on Christ alone.<sup>1</sup>

He not only, thus, distinguished sharply the inner reality from the external form, but he put the two in conflict,<sup>2</sup> according as each is predominant in a church, or within the church.<sup>3</sup> The external false church wars against the little real group of Christ's followers.<sup>4</sup> The latter believe in Christ's victory, but cannot see it until the end. For their kingdom is a kingdom which is heard of but not seen. It is a Hör-Reich not a Sehe-Reich.<sup>5</sup> Within the church are two groups, according to Scripture, the church in general (in genere) all who outwardly conform, and the elect (electi), regenerated by the Spirit. The latter form the "Sancta ecclesia", though outwardly they appear as weak and sinful.<sup>6</sup> Luther at this point is less careful than earlier to confine the use of the term ecclesia to the real Christenheit.

To the end Luther's conception of the church is as the group of those justified by faith in Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> On Jn 10<sup>12-16</sup>, Sommerpostille, in LW 21,333

<sup>2</sup> cf E Seeberg, op cit, 445-7

<sup>3</sup> On Jn 15<sup>26-7</sup>.16<sup>1-4</sup>, Sommerpostille, in LW 21,433

<sup>4</sup> On 2 Cor 3<sup>4-11</sup>, Sommerpostille, in LW 22,210

<sup>5</sup> Sermon on the Kingdom of Christ 1545, in  
LWE 20/2,394-5

<sup>6</sup> On Joel 3<sup>22</sup> (Et erit Ier. Sancta), in LWE XXV, 285-6



Sola ... fide in Christum ... tota Ecclesia ab initio mundi usque in finem iustificatur.<sup>1</sup> This governs his notion of the church's invisibility for you cannot see forgiveness of sins, you cannot see it when a child is incorporated into Christ by baptism. There is only the Word to hold fast to in faith.<sup>2</sup> Das äusserlich und weltlich Reich will gefühlet sein. Aber Christus Reich kann nicht sagen: Ich fühl es, und greif mit dem Finger die Vergebung der Sünden, Leben und Seligkeit; sondern es will gegläubt sein.<sup>3</sup>

This remains with Luther even though at the same time he speaks more and more frequently of the church in its visible form, as for example in 1544 in his Sommerpostille. The church on earth, according to its form as an external Gemeinschaft is a "samlung" of those who appropriate the true teaching of the Gospel, and are sanctified by Word and sacrament. Among them are the hypocrites, who participate in their community and will remain and must until the judgment.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Promotion Disputation of Heinrich Schmedenstede 1542, in LW 39/2,188

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on the Kingdom of Christ, in LW 20/2,395ff

<sup>3</sup> LW 20/2,408

<sup>4</sup> On Mt 22<sup>1-14</sup>, Sommerpostille 1544, in LW 22,344

## S U M M A R Y

Before turning to consider Calvin's view, we may summarise the position of Luther in the following sentences:

1. The church is invisible because it belongs in the realm of faith. It is seen only in and through the incarnate, crucified and risen Christ. It is seen in this way as made in a cruciform. As such it is not directly or rationally observable as something belonging to the world, but is indirectly apprehended by faith in the same way as upon the Cross, Christ is the revelation of God in the form of man.
2. The membership, nature and form of the church are all conditioned by the form of God's revelation in Christ. The members of the church are hidden, the nature of the church is spiritual, the form of the church is free and universal. The church is in, not above the world, but is not of the world. Its life proceeds from that of Christ, and its centre is in the concrete, church-creating Word of God. The church is, therefore, to be functionally described in terms of preaching and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.
3. The church is, further, invisible because it cannot be identified with any particular historical structure, in particular with the Roman Church under its head, the Pope. Its life on earth is essentially a free communion of believers with Christ, and with one another, in faith, hope and

love, in the Spirit, centred in, and nourished by the preached Word and sacraments.

4. The church is invisible because much and many that are in any given ecclesiastical community or institution are not of the church, but are secretly or openly hostile to Christ, and under the alien power of the Enemy of God.

5. The church is invisible because even its true members are, as sinners, only larvae of the church. The church as the community of the justified is as invisible as the justification of each believer. It is the Word, Spirit and faith that, in their conjunction with the historical persons and materials of the created world, constitute the church as church.

6. The church is invisible to the natural man. It is also invisible to the believer except by faith in the Word of God, and in this Word confessed by other believers.

7. The church is invisible because it is ruled and extended invisibly by Christ himself through his Word, in preaching and the Sacraments. For Luther the point where the church took shape, varied in the course of his life. At first it was the universal communio sanctorum of the regenerated; then the point moved in the direction of the community of earnest believers; and finally, he rested in the view of the objective institution which has the true sacraments and understanding of the Word. These three foci were never mutually exclusive, but all had their permanent place in his view.

## PART TWO

### THE INVISIBILITY OF THE CHURCH FOR CALVIN

#### I. BEFORE CALVIN'S FIRST STAY IN GENEVA

Calvin first spoke of the invisibility of the church in the Institutes of 1536. He spoke of it in terms scarcely distinguishable from those of Luther. The church is not visible, because it is believed. We believe, according to the promise of God, that where two or three are gathered together, there is Christ. Hence, wherever the Word of God is sincerely preached and heard, and the sacraments are administered after the institution of Christ, there the Church of Christ is present, according to the promise of God. Illic aliquam esse Dei ecclesiam nullo modo ambigendum est; quando eius promissio fallere non potest.<sup>1</sup> But although present to faith, the church is not visible to the eye. Creduntur enim quae praesenti oculo spectari nequeunt. The church, therefore, cannot be a material, bodily thing, a res carnalis. It is neither sensorily perceived, nor contained in a definite space, not located at some particular dwelling place.<sup>2</sup>

The invisibility of the church is thus set in relation to visible signs, and to faith in the promise of God in Matthew 18<sup>20</sup>. The church also is invisible, and not a

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<sup>1</sup> Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia, in Corpus Reformatorum, Brunswick, 1863-1900, 1,77

<sup>2</sup> CO 1,77

res carnalis, according to the canon of Hebrews 11<sup>1</sup>.<sup>1</sup> So that Calvin followed Luther by focussing his attention on the same point where the invisibility and visibility of the church come together.

Also following Luther, Calvin made the church depend solely on Christ. At Orleans, two years before the Institutes first appeared, Calvin wrote the Psychopannychia, attacking the Anabaptist doctrine of soul-sleep. In the preface he asserted, in reply to those who lament the lost unity of the church, that Christ alone is the principle of unity and the bond of love. (Nullam nos agnoscere unitatem, nisi in Christo: nullam caritatem nisi cuius ipse sit vinculum).<sup>2</sup> But Calvin's doctrine that the church is a reality derived from Christ, is formulated differently from Luther's. In the Institutes of 1536, Calvin expounded the nature of the church, as Luther did, from the Creed. But the ecclesia is not immediately linked to the communio sanctorum and considered virtually as the latter. It receives an extended treatment before the communio sanctorum is mentioned. Then, when he does introduce it, it is interpreted partly according to his understanding of the ecclesia, partly in the "horizontal" sense of the mutual communication of the gifts which the members of the ecclesia possess (mutuam bonorum omnium communicationem ac participationem).<sup>3</sup>

The "gloss" which Calvin substituted for communio sanctorum is the totality of the elect, the universus

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<sup>1</sup> CO 1,77

<sup>2</sup> CO 5,171-2

<sup>3</sup> CO 1,77



electorum numerus. The term is Augustinian, and was used also by Wiclif and Hus. But Calvin brought it, for the first time, into juxtaposition with ecclesia in the Creed. When Luther defined the church as communio sanctorum, he brought the term down to earth i.e. it was made to apply not so much to the saints in heaven (in the mediaeval sense) as to the justified sinners on earth. Calvin now by the term universus electorum numerus, widened the scope of ecclesia again so that it spans heaven and earth. For it includes the angels, as well as men living and dead, and those scattered through all the world (quibuscunque in terris agent, aut ubivis gentium dispersi sint).<sup>1</sup>

The church in this total sense is necessarily invisible. Not only is the head, the dux et princeps, the invisible, risen Christ, but part of the body does not even consist of men, or dwell on earth. Yet it is one body, one societas, corpus, one "Christ-community". In Christ, the members of the body are elected before the foundation of the world that they should be gathered together into the regnum Dei. Thus is the societas of Christ catholic and universal.<sup>2</sup>

Calvin gave immense importance to the idea of the Christ-community. And he worked it out later in terms of the concrete community of believers, even in constitutional terms of congregational self-government under the sole juridical headship of Christ. In the 1536 Institutes it is stated in more general terms. The elect are so united (uniuntur) in

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<sup>1</sup> CO 1,72

<sup>2</sup> CO 1,72

Christ, that depending on one head, they coalesce into one body (in unum ... corpus coalescant). This oneness is authenticated by the Spirit of God, and expressed in the faith, hope, and love, in which all live.<sup>1</sup>

Equally prominent is the concern with the members of the church as the elect. The church is holy, because the elect, its members, are sanctified by God. In openly calling, justifying and glorifying them, he declares his eternal election of them. Scripture reckons the church or people of God in terms of those in whom election is openly revealed through calling and justification. But in so doing it accommodates itself to our understanding (sensui nostro). Calvin would press the matter further back than this: often members of the people of God seem to be righteous (virtutes) but are not really elect. On the other hand the real elect (vere electi) are not, sometimes, reckoned in the people of God (nondum ... declarati).<sup>2</sup>

By this concern, Calvin sought like Luther to prevent any attempt whether on Anabaptist or Roman lines to constitute the church's membership according to the virtutes of the individual, or the inherent power of a salvation-dispensing institution. There is no real security in these. Secure membership in the church of God is only to be found if God provides it, by his election. When he does this it is impossible to be separated from the Christ-community. The elect may waver, stumble and even fall, but they are never lost to the

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<sup>1</sup> CO 1,72-3

<sup>2</sup> CO 1,73

real church.<sup>1</sup> The importance of establishing this for those, especially in France, who were faced with persecution, banishment, or martyrdom, is obvious. Luther likewise had to face this in the Sermo de virtute excommunicatione. With -15 both, adherence to Christ and to the Christ-community is the basis for withstanding the judgment of the Church of Rome, but Calvin states the position more sharply and uncompromisingly.

It is, for Calvin, God alone who maintains his church in being. There was never a time when God was without his church. Membership in it is based on this fact, and on it we build our lives. We are certain of the goodness of God (divinae bonitatis fiducia), not only in maintaining the church in being, but of maintaining us in the church. Without personal faith in our own incorporation and sanctification, all faith in the church is useless. Personal faith is centred on Christ. Like Luther, Calvin anchored election in the believing community of Christ. Christ is he in whom the Father elected all whom he wished to be his. If we associate ourselves with Christ (si Christo communicamus) we may hold ourselves to be in the elect membership of his church. In thus equating faith in Christ with election, Calvin reinforced the community idea in the Christ-community, and controlled any individualist tendencies in the notion of election. If by faith we possess Christ we ought to be sure of our election. Quando itaque Christum ... fide possidemus,

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<sup>1</sup> CO 1,73

certo statuendum, ... nos inter eos esse, quos Dominus ab aeterno elegit.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from our own certitude, there is no possibility of discerning in a community of believers who definitely belongs to the Christ-community. It is not our affair, (non nostrum est). Only God can judge; only he sees who will persevere to the end. The power of the Keys does not entitle the church to pronounce absolutely on its own membership. It merely signifies that the judgment of God depends on the receiving of the Gospel in faith. He who accepts Christ is accepted by God: he who rejects Christ is rejected by God. But there is a proximate standard, which, Calvin asserted, is provided by Scripture. The method of distinguishing is according to certain notae: confession (confessio fidei), a good life (vitae exemplum), and observance of the sacraments (sacramentorum participatio).<sup>2</sup> These criteria he may have found in Zwingli's works.<sup>3</sup> Without them, a person is not a member of the church at present; with them, he is, despite moral imperfections.

This judgment is described as a judgment of love. (iudicium caritatis).<sup>4</sup> Luther used it also in passing, but, as a principle distinct from the certitudo fidei, it comes rather from Augustine, who mentioned it in connection with predestination:

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<sup>1</sup> CO 1,74

<sup>2</sup> CO 1,75

<sup>3</sup> Wernle, Der Evangelische Glaube, Tübingen, JCB Mohr, 1919, III, 55

<sup>4</sup> CO 1,75

"Nesciantes enim, quis pertineat ad predestinatorum numerum, quis non pertineat: sic affici debemus caritatis affectu, ut omnes velimus salvos fieri". (1

Augustine was guarding the church against Donatism, Calvin against Anabaptism.<sup>2</sup>

Already Calvin showed a concern for the actual community life of the believers, of purifying and maintaining standards of membership. His attitude towards excommunication, also, was that of a "reformed Churchman", rather than one who, like Luther in his earlier years, was subjected to excommunication himself. The influence of the Reform movement of South Germany and Northern Switzerland, in particular Bucer, is apparent here.<sup>3</sup> Those who do not possess the true faith, or whose actions flagrantly contradict what they profess, are to be reckoned as not at present belonging to the Christ-community. But their excommunication is strictly defined by the purposes of excommunication: that God's honour be not defamed, that other members of the church be not corrupted by bad examples, and that the offenders be brought to repentance and amendment of life -- God's honour, and ecclesiastical pedagogy! Nor is excommunication to be prolonged so that they fall into despair. Their return to the church is always to be hoped for. Calvin's humanity is reinforced by his recognition that the excommunicati may still be the electi.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> De Corr.et Gratia c 15,46, quoted in O Ritschl, Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck, 1926, III, n 15

<sup>2</sup> Wendel, Calvin, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1950, 103

<sup>3</sup> See Wernle, op cit, III,55

<sup>4</sup> CO 1,76-7



The term communio sanctorum, as was said above, is differently interpreted than with Luther. It comprises in the ecclesia all the electi who share in the goods that each possesses. Each one has his special gifts and tasks, but they are for the sake of the whole body. The communio sanctorum becomes a community of believers (communitas fidelium), in which each shares and is incorporated into one body (in unum collecti ac compacti sunt corpus): an idea containing a more explicit involvement in a natural community or societas than Luther's communio. The reason for this lies in Calvin's heavier emphasis on the church as the mystical body of Christ. (Haec est ecclesia catholica, corpus Christi mysticum). Here he drew less on Luther than on the Greek fathers such as Chrysostom.<sup>1</sup> He did add, too, that the term communio sanctorum defines more closely credere ecclesiam,<sup>2</sup> but his interest was more in the church as corpus Christi, than as communio sanctorum.

For Calvin as for Luther, outside the church and the communion of saints, there is no forgiveness, and no salvation. In strongly Lutheran terms he made forgiveness the basis (fundamentum) of the church. Through it we come to God and enter the church.<sup>3</sup> But less than for Luther is the church the "hospital" where sinners find forgiveness.

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<sup>2</sup> CO 1,78

<sup>1</sup> See Torrance, "The Eschatology of the Reformers", Edinburgh, (MS), 1952

<sup>3</sup> CO 1,78

Further on in the 1536 Institutes, the conception of the church as universus praedestinatorum,<sup>1</sup> is less in prominence. There is, it is true, no pronounced shift in position when he referred to such terms as ecclesia fidelium, coetus fidelium, and coetus fidelis populi.<sup>1</sup> For, as we have seen, the faithful are the elect, and the elect the faithful. Nevertheless, he became involved in more practical questions and was thinking of the church as local individual congregations (ecclesiae).<sup>2</sup> In this he has none of Luther's life-long concern to separate the true church from dependence on external order. If a constitution (politia) is necessary in every human society (societas) to preserve peace and the public good, then it is especially needed in the churches (in ecclesiis praesertim observandum esse).<sup>3</sup> During the whole course of the Institutes there is no attempt made to distinguish the church in its invisibility from the reformed communities or congregations.

In the 1536 Institutes, therefore, may be traced the emphasis of Zwingli, who was concerned above all with the individual congregations; as well as Luther's insistence on the power of the Word, as God's instrument in the creating and ruling of the church.<sup>4</sup>

In the Preface to the Institutes, Calvin revealed another important side to his conception of the church which

<sup>1</sup> CO 1,135.139.163

<sup>2</sup> CO 1,185

<sup>3</sup> CO 1,225-6

<sup>4</sup> See Strohl, "La Notion d'Eglise chez les Reformateurs", in Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie religieuses, Strasbourg, 1936, 297ff

bridges the invisibility and the visibility of the church. This is his dynamic, historical view of the church as sometimes hidden and without apparent form, but constantly emerging into openness. Here the church is at once the numerus praedestinatorum, the coetus fidelium, and the ecclesiae. He put the central issue between Romans and Reformed as follows: The Romans claim that the form of the church (ecclesiae forma) is always visible and apparent (apparere et spectabilem), and is placed in the See and hierarchy of the Church of Rome. The latter maintain that the church may exist with no apparent form (nulla apparente forma), and that this form when it appears is not with external splendour, but is known by the pure preaching of the Word of God, and the lawful administration of the sacraments.<sup>1</sup> Calvin supported this view from Old Testament history. The church among the Jews was so deformed that no exterior form (species) shone forth. Then after the Advent, the church lay hidden without form (deformis latuit), even as it was in Elijah's day (1 Kings 19<sup>14</sup>).<sup>2</sup>

This view of the church as being obscured from view by corruption and departure from obedience to God, is also found in Luther, e.g. in 1541, in Wider Hans Worst, where he spoke of the church in Saxony as the New Testament Church shining out after being hidden behind the dark clouds of the mediaeval Papacy. But Luther did not develop it as Calvin did. For Calvin, the church's invisibility was not so much because God works against all appearance in the world

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<sup>1</sup> CO 1,20-1

<sup>2</sup> CO 1,21

(though he does this), but that he withdraws the church from visibility (ecclesiae suae exteriorem notitiam ab hominum aspectu) as his judgment (divina iustitia) upon human sin.<sup>1</sup> This development is significant. It means that for Calvin the church's invisibility is a sign of the sinful degeneration of the prevailing visible form of the church. The true state of the church is that of coming ever more fully into visibility. Just as for both Calvin and Luther, the Word's action was dynamic in history, stirring up Satan, and causing believers to appear as seditious,<sup>2</sup> so the church also, for Calvin, is constantly pressing into visibility wherever it is truly constituted by Word and sacraments.

Calvin was in the sharpest opposition to the false visibility of the Roman Church. From this point of view we may understand his stress on election as the severing of the church from false visibility. But he did not, as has sometimes been suggested, introduce a radical individualism to destroy the Materialisierung of the church.<sup>3</sup> Election is in the context of the Christ-community, and the signs of the true form of the church are Luther's: Word and sacraments. Also faith is thought of as identical with election and as being realised through discipline in the increasing knowledge of God. At one point only did Calvin, in his opposition to Rome, do damage to his own view of the church. This is in the inordinate stress on the fact that many are in the church though not of the elect. This led him to talk about

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<sup>1</sup> CO 1,21

<sup>2</sup> CO 1,23-4

<sup>3</sup> Against Wernle, op cit, III,51

the Bible "accomodating" itself to human weakness; an idea which tends to break up his equation of election with faith in Christ.

It has been the custom to discover three disparate conceptions of the church in Calvin's thought, and especially perhaps here in the 1536 Institutes: the ideal, purely invisible church of the elect, the visible church of faith whose signs are Word and sacraments, and the church where 'righteousness' is the goal. These three conceptions are fathered on Augustine, Luther, and the South German reformers.<sup>1</sup> However, this as Kolfaus and Bohatec have shown,<sup>2</sup> is to overlook the important and central position Calvin gave to the Christ-community. Election is, to begin with, thought of corporately, and in Christ (following Bucer). And while there are good grounds for the view that he did not completely think through the relation of election to Christology,<sup>3</sup> it is true that Christ is made the material cause of election, and that the elect are made to form the Christ-community. The latter is realised in communities of believers around the Word and sacraments. And these communities involve ordered earthly congregations. In other words, it is not so much a juxtaposition of three separate views, as a single view which conceives of a double line of eternal election and temporal realization taking place in the one invisible-visible church, the Christ-community, the Body of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 55-6

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B

<sup>3</sup> See JKS Reid, "The Office of Christ in Predestination", in The Scottish Journal of Theology, vol 1 (1948), 5-19, 166-183; also Karl Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, Zürich, Zollikon, 1942, II/2, 70-2, 373-4



## II. DURING CALVIN'S STAY AT GENEVA, AND AT STRASBOURG 1536-41

Calvin went to Geneva in 1536, and played a leading part in reconstituting the church there. The work of the Institutes prepared the way, but new documents had to be drawn up: a confession of faith, articles concerning the organization of the church and a catechism. The catechism dealt with the nature of the church, and followed the Institutes in treating the church as the Christ-community, to which both election and faith were subordinated:

"Tous les eleuz par le lyen de la foy sont conioinctz en une Eglise et societe et en un peuple de Dieu, duquel Christ nostre Seigneur est le conducteur et prince et chief comme dun corps, ainsi que en luy ilz ont este eleuz devant la constitution du monde - affin quilz feussent tous assemblez au royaume de Dieu." (1)

The church is thought of in terms of predestination and Christology, as the community-place where election in Christ is worked out.

The catholicity of the church is also thought of in the same way. The church, ceste societe, is catholic, for all the elect are unis et conioinctz en Christ, growing together as members of his Body, in one faith, hope, and love, in the one Spirit of God, and called to the same inheritance of eternal life. The communion of saints is an extension of the idea in terms of the "Liebeskommunismus" that Luther stressed in his conception of communio. Noteworthy, too, is the

synonym, la communion des fideles.<sup>1</sup> But while the communion of saints is a community of sharing, not a community on the road to holiness through discipline, it is not without order and discipline, and duly constituted ministry. And those who disregard these cut themselves off from the society of the church.<sup>2</sup> Again, there is evident, as in the Institutes of 1536, the progression from the church as Christ-community to an outward, ordered community built around Word, sacraments, and ministry. The latter is the church, as the redemptive work of God making itself actual in the world.

There was nothing mechanical or inevitable in this progression, at least in Calvin's experience. The outward community could be factious and truculent. And Calvin had no elevated political authority to back him. It was in the light of a first attempt ending in virtual failure, that Calvin found himself in Strasbourg. There he wrote an enlarged second edition of the Institutes in 1539. His object now was not an enlarged catechism, but a dogmatic treatise, embodying the fruit of his reading and thinking and experience. It showed the influence of his colleagues at Strasbourg, and was set in relation to the Lutheran movement, represented by Melanchthon, the opposing Roman and Anabaptist "sects", and his church at Geneva.

In his 1536 Institutes he had placed man's salvation back on God alone, and the church on Christ alone. God's election stood absolutely firm, Christ's hold over his

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<sup>1</sup> CO 22,57

<sup>2</sup> CO 22,71

followers was unshakeable. He would no more permit them to be separated from him than he would allow his own members to be torn in pieces. But in 1539, with a Reformed Church to defend, he felt able to stress the necessity of the church for salvation, without fear of this being taken as a return to salvation through a visible institution and hierarchy with an inherent power of dispensing grace. If we want salvation, we must continue in the church. (Dum in Ecclesiae sinu continemur, semper nobis constaturam securi sumus).<sup>1</sup> The church is the means (effectus) by which salvation is appropriated. In the language of Luther and early Catholicism, it is the mother of all believers (est enim nostra omnium mater).<sup>2</sup> The idea of the Christ-community is strongly reinforced by a practical interest in the outward community of believers. The latter has entrusted to it the "treasures" of God's grace (penes quam gratiae suae thesauros depositos esse voluit Dominus).<sup>3</sup> Even though, perhaps more than Luther intended, when using the term in the Ninety Five Theses, the church has no power of disposal over the thesauri.<sup>4</sup> The church is, lastly, described as elect and separated, the body and fullness of Christ, the pillar and ground of truth, the perpetual abode of the living God (electa segregataque, corpus est et plenitudo Christi, columna et firmamentum veritatis, perpetuum habitaculum Dei vivi).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> COS 5,6

<sup>2</sup> CO 1,539

<sup>3</sup> COS 5,1 n "a"

<sup>4</sup> Quistorp, "Sichtbare und unsichtbare Kirche bei Calvin", in Evangelische Theologie, 1949/50, no 2/3,87

<sup>5</sup> CO 1,541

The question must be raised as to the location of the church which is the mother of all believers. It would seem that Calvin intended the church, in this case, to be the Christ-community both in its invisibility, and in its openly visible form. He maintained, as he did in 1536, the church's invisibility as an object of faith. But now he added that we are to regard the church as one, both when it is invisible to us and when it openly appears. (Nihil opus est ecclesiam ipsam oculis cernere, vel manibus palpare; quin potius eo, quod in fide sita est, admonemur, nihilo minus cogitandum esse, dum intelligentiam nostram praeterit, quam si palam appareat).<sup>1</sup> The reason is that the invisible Christ-community emerges into visibility. It becomes the visible church (ecclesia visibilis), with a "face" (facies) that is seen and recognised by characteristics and symbols (certis notis et quasi symbolis). These are the Word and the sacraments. In 1536 these nota are the point where the church emerges into visibility, but in 1539 the stress has moved more to the side of visibility. Hinc nascitur nobis et emergit conspicua oculis nostris ecclesiae facies.<sup>2</sup> Again, as before, the guarantee for this transition into visibility is the faithfulness of God, according to his promise which cannot fail (Matthew 18<sup>20</sup>). It is also the belief, which is central in Luther, that the Word has hidden creative power. Word and sacraments are the necessary presupposition of any visible community, and of its striving to conform to a moral pattern that does

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<sup>1</sup> CO 1,542

<sup>2</sup> CO 1,542-3

not dishonour Christ (Heiligkeitsideal).<sup>1</sup> Without these the Heiligkeitsideal turns the church into a sect, and the facies of the church is no longer apparent.<sup>2</sup> (By denying infant baptism, and so breaking the historical continuity of the church, the Anabaptists were just such a sect). But with Word and sacraments, discipline is practically necessary as the bond (vinculum) of the community of believers.<sup>3</sup> In this way Calvin fixed where the face of the church appeared, and also at what point a member should separate from any given community as a false church. For the followers of the Reform, such as those in France, where church and State combined against them, it was a crucial question. The Papacy had perverted the necessary knowledge of the faith (summa necessariae doctrinae) and corrupted the Eucharist so that the Body of Christ was not shown forth.<sup>4</sup> Hence there was no danger, in leaving Rome, of leaving the true church. (Quare nullum est periculum ne ab exitiali tot flagitiorum participatione desciscendo, ab Ecclesia Christi divellamur).<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Calvin expressly recognised that in the false Church of Rome (the profana conventicula) there are vestiges of the true church (vestigia ecclesiae).<sup>6</sup> Hence it would be a decision determined by a particular situation whether to remain in a particular local "church", or whether to leave and become "churchless", or whether to form an under-cover reform congregation.

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<sup>1</sup> Wernle, op cit, III, 60

<sup>2</sup> CO 1, 544

<sup>3</sup> CO 1, 550

<sup>4</sup> COS 5, 31

<sup>5</sup> COS 5, 31

<sup>6</sup> CO 1, 559. 560



There was also the danger of people separating from a true church on the ground of its shortcomings. Calvin's position was as "objectively" based on Word and sacraments as Luther's. So long as these are present the face of the church remains whatever the faults (etiamsi multis alioqui vitiis scateat). Some doctrines are central, others of secondary importance: e.g. that God is one, that Christ is God and the son of God, and that salvation is by the mercy of God; as against what happens to the soul of the believer immediately after death. The sacraments may have defects in their administration, and false believers and immoral conduct may mar the church of the saints. The Galatian and Corinthian churches stood out as glaring examples.<sup>1</sup> Such toleration had its limits; and these Calvin prescribed in 1536 as grounds for excommunication. But schism from the external society (externa societas) wherein the communio of God's Church is preserved, means the danger of falling away (lapsus) from the communio sanctorum.<sup>2</sup> Here is a strong concern for the church as a congregational community (externa societas) beyond that of Luther.

Visibility is also accentuated in the case of the church universal (ecclesia universalis). It is no longer simply the Christ-community of the elect, but the totality of the external society of the church. It comprises all who agree in doctrine and have the same religion. It is made up of single congregations, singulae ecclesiae, societies of

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<sup>1</sup> COS 5,16ff

<sup>2</sup> COS 5,20

believers in towns and villages, with many professing, but not genuine believers (etiamsi ab Ecclesia sint revera extranei). The ecclesia universalis is a substantial unity. There the facies of the Christ-community appears in the world. It is no community-less communio but comprises ordered communities (conventus legitimi) possessing inherent authority.<sup>1</sup> There is a clear distinction between individual membership of the Christ-community and a community's membership. The former's ground is election and faith in Christ, the latter's is the presence of Word and sacraments. The universal church in this sense can have an actual basis in social groupings, but is perhaps narrower in outreach than Luther's conception of the world-wide communio sanctorum.

In the Answer to Sadolet, also of 1539, there is a certain reversion from this position towards the pure Christ-community. Calvin turned to counter the blandishments of a Roman cardinal, who invited Calvin's Genevan Church to return to Rome. Sadolet defined the Catholic Church vaguely as that which is universally united in Christ and directed by his Spirit. Calvin said it is rather the society of all the saints (societas sanctorum omnium), diffused over the whole world, in all ages, but bound in one teaching (doctrina) and Spirit of Christ, observing unity of faith and brotherly concord.<sup>2</sup> Except for the words societas, and, possibly, doctrina, this might have been Luther's definition. But the word societas is put in deliberately to characterise

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<sup>1</sup> COS 5,14

<sup>2</sup> CO 5,392.394

the church as essentially a community, not a hierarchy disguised as an exclusive vehicle of the Spirit. Doctrina, from the context, is the Word, something omitted from Sadolet's definition.

Nor did Calvin stop at this position. The church is our mother, not in the vague sense of a communio, but as the church which presses into visibility. Defending himself against the charge of setting up a new church when Rome had been the church for 1500 years, Calvin asserted that the Reformers had merely restored the ancient face of the church. (Sed nihil aliud conari quam ut instauretur aliquando vetusta illa ecclesiae facies).<sup>1</sup> The norm for the church is the Apostolic. Deviation from it is not the leading of the Spirit but plain human error. The norm comprises pure doctrine, discipline, sacraments and ceremonies, and a ministry of the Word. Is it then schism to restore the face of the Apostolic Church, or necessity, when these things have all been subverted?<sup>2</sup>

Despite this, Calvin went further than ever before in acknowledging that there are not only vestigia under Rome but churches of Christ (ecclesiae Christi). It is the Pope and his hierarchy which have deformed the Kingdom of Christ (alterere et disperdere Christi regnum, donec vastitate et ruina deformarent).<sup>3</sup>

While the main definition of the church is in terms of the pure Christ-community, it is not without a necessary

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<sup>1</sup> CO 5,394

<sup>2</sup> CO 5,402-3

<sup>3</sup> CO 5,403

visible form. To cohere well, for example, it must be bound together by discipline. Disciplina enim, non secus ac nervis, corpus ecclesiae, ut bene cohaereat, necesse est colligari. So, too, the order of the ministry, is asserted to have been constituted by Christ among the faithful. First Corinthians 14<sup>29</sup>, "let the prophet speak ... and let the other judge", is the slender Scriptural basis for supporting the judging of a "prophet-teacher" by general consent (consessu).<sup>1</sup>

He returned towards the end to the pure Christ-community. The "Reformer", making his confession at the Last Judgment, says that church unity for him began and ended in Christ, and that he was the only bond (vinculum) for preserving it.<sup>2</sup> The concluding prayer is that Sadolet and his party will perceive that this unity will come only if Christ, who reconciled us to God, regathers all out of dispersion (dissipatio) into the community (societas) of his Body, into a unity based on his one Word and Spirit. Ecclesiastical unity is dominically conferred and possible only in the one community of Christ.

If such unity can come only by Christ's action, the first concern is loyalty to Christ. Calvin's view of the church was stiffened by prophetic intransigence not tempered by a Bucerian mildness. He saw himself as in line with the prophets who strove with zeal to preserve the church spotless for Christ.<sup>3</sup> And a prophetic view tends to stress polemically the invisibility of the true church, and to

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<sup>1</sup> CO 5,404.406-7

<sup>2</sup> CO 5,409

<sup>3</sup> CO 5,410.415

reject the sinful structure of the past and present, even while attempting its concrete reconstruction in terms of the invisible reality. There is however not yet a formal distinction between the visible and invisible church. The Lordship of Christ and the rooting of the church in the Christ-community form the unity of both sides. Hence, in the Consilium admodum paternum Pauli III, 1540, he, even more than Luther, cannot allow any human head of the church in its visible expression.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the hiddenness of the church, referred to in the Preface to the Institutes, is again alluded to in the Romans Commentary of 1539-40. In 11<sup>3</sup> he speaks of there being no appearance of the church in Elias' time (nullus conspectus ecclesiae). The church lay hidden as if buried (quasi in sepulcro). And yet it was preserved by God. Hence the church cannot be judged by the outward appearance (ex sensu). It is kept by the secret providence of God when there is no appearance of it (quae nulla oculis nostris apparet).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> CO 5,474

<sup>2</sup> CO 49,212-3



### III. THE SECOND RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CHURCH AT GENEVA

1541-43

In 1541, Calvin returned to Geneva, and was there until his death in 1564. He set about reestablishing the church on the basis of the Word of God, and after the usage of the early church. Only on this basis, he declared, could the Genevan church hold together.<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastical ordinances (1541) were drawn up. And the following year a new catechism appeared, which contained a section dealing with the nature of the church.

The Catholic Church is la compagnie des fideles (corpus fidelium) which God has elected to eternal life. It is the fruit of the death of Christ. Without it the sacrifice of Christ would be of no effect. The church is therefore the goal of the process of salvation. The elect are chosen, justified, and sanctified, that God's glory may shine forth in them.<sup>2</sup>

The church is the Christ-community, united in one body, under one head, such that there are not several churches (il n'y a pas plusieurs Eglises), but one alone, spread over the whole world (espandue par tout le monde). The term communion of saints expresses its unity more clearly, besides making clear that all God's gifts to his church are available for

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<sup>1</sup> CO 11,281; see Rieker, Grundsätze reformierter Kirchenverfassung, Leipzig, Hirschfeld, 1899, 95-100

<sup>2</sup> CO 6,39

each member (chacun fidele) because all have fellowship together (communion ensemble).<sup>1</sup>

This is the church of faith. There is also - and here Calvin first openly made the distinction - the visible church of God (il y a bien Eglise de Dieu visible). It has signs (enseignes, indiciis) to recognise it by. (Calvin thus attaches signs to the visible church, whereas Luther stressed their connection with the invisible side of the church). In the Catechism, however, the invisible side of the church is meant: the company of those whom God has elected in order to save. This company is not all, or always, visible to the eye, nor discernable by signs, (ne se peut pas pleinement voir a l'oeil; nec cernitur perpetuo oculis, nec signis dignoscitur - 1545 Latin ed.).<sup>2</sup> Calvin seems to mean by this that the company of the elect is not visible in all periods of history, nor fully visible when it is discernible in history. The idea seems connected to the view expressed in the preface to the 1536 Institutes, of the church as withdrawn from visibility as a consequence of human sin. And yet, the distinction made between this company of elect, and the visible church, to which the signs are attached, leaves the impression that the former is some entity independent of the church's visible facies. The impression arises because of Calvin's concern to isolate the true membership of the church as individually elected. But in his thinking on the church there is no ground for suggesting that two entities are contemplated. The true

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<sup>1</sup> CO 6,39

<sup>2</sup> CO 6,41

state of the Christ-community is to have its facies openly visible.

This is intended since it is added that in the church of faith holiness is by no means perfect. It is engaged in constant warfare in the world, labours under infirmities, and will be imperfect until it completely becomes the Christ-community (iusqu'à ce qu'elle soit plainement conioincte à son chef Jesus Christ duquel elle est sanctifiée).<sup>1</sup> The Christ-community is therefore the eschatological community awaiting and striving for its final redemption.

That the Christ-community is thus involved in natural communities in the world, is shown by the warning to maintain unity, to persevere in its fellowship, and thereby to show that one is a "true" member of the church. Only thus is there salvation and forgiveness.

"Pource que nul n'obtient pardon de ses pechez, que premierement il ne soit incorpore au peuple de Dieu, et persevere en unite et communion avec le corps de Christ: et ainsi qu'il soit vray membre de l'Eglise."

Schismatics are cut off from hope of salvation during the time they remain in schism, however short. The church is the area of salvation, and the Christ-community is the object of God's redemption not just (the salvation of) the individual. Incorporation and forgiveness coincide. There is no desire to arrange a succession: first incorporation, then forgiveness. The Christ-community is the all important reality, but it is made up of elect individuals. Hence a tension is created between the community and the person's life. Resolved in the

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<sup>1</sup> CO 6,41

direction of the community it degenerates into institutionalism, in the direction of the person, to individualism, and the splintering of the community. Calvin's concern is perhaps at this time more to prevent both these aberrations.

The following year, 1543, saw a new edition of the Institutes, as the theological justification for the ecclesiastical ordinances of 1541. The influence of Bucer is manifest in the conception of the church as an organism and as a fraternity.<sup>1</sup> The invisible side is briefly treated, compared to its visibility, but it remains the foundation.<sup>2</sup> And the distinction referred to in the Catechism is now worked out explicitly and grounded in Scripture.

In 1539 he had referred to the Ecclesia visibilis. Now he added, following Zwingli,<sup>3</sup> that the Scriptures speak in a two-fold way concerning the church (bifariam de Ecclesia), as it really is before God (vera est coram Deo), and as it is seen among men (respectu hominum). Before God it is the "invisible church" (ecclesia invisibilis), the first time Calvin used the term. It is only visible to God (solius Dei oculis). It must be believed (credere necesse est). To it belong those adopted by God, sanctified by the Spirit, and incorporated into Christ. They include the sancti in the world (in terra habitant) and the electi throughout the ages (qui ab origine mundi fuerunt).<sup>4</sup>

The church (Ecclesia) is also the ecclesia visibilis. It comprises the whole multitude of mankind scattered over

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<sup>1</sup> Wendel, op cit, 104-5; Strohl, op cit, 308-9

<sup>2</sup> Wernle, op cit, 360; Wendel, op cit, 225

<sup>3</sup> Strohl, op cit, 308

<sup>4</sup> COS 5,12

the world (universa hominum multitudo in orbe diffusa) with the following characteristics: They profess to serve one God and Christ; they are initiated by baptism into their faith; and by participation in the Lord's Supper they profess unity in true doctrine and love (Coenae participatione unitatem in vera doctrina et charitate testatur). They also agree over the Word of God (consensionem habet in verbo Domini) and retain the preaching ministry of the Word which Christ instituted (a Christo institutum). In this church are many hypocrites (plurimi sunt permixti hypocritae). They are tolerated either because of insufficient proof of their guilt (quia legitimo iudicio convinci nequeunt), or because discipline is not always strict enough. Nevertheless, we are bound to take account of and to belong to this church (observare eiusque communionem colere iubemur).<sup>1</sup>

It should be noted that no scriptural evidence of the visible-invisible church distinction is forthcoming. Also it is very sharply drawn. For the first time, it seems, he contrasted directly the church in the eyes of God and in the eyes of men. The ecclesia invisibilis, it should also be noted, is not simply the electi but first of all the sancti in terra. ( ! ) And both are adopted, sanctified and incorporated in the Christ-community. It is not a question of unrelated elect individuals, but of an invisible relation whose substance is Christ and his community.

The ecclesia visibilis is the natural community to which signs are affixed: confession of faith, baptism, the

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<sup>1</sup> COS 5,12



Lord's Supper (which is a sign of unity in doctrine and love) and the ministry of the Word of God. We are enjoined to be members of the ecclesia visibilis, but, it must be confessed, after saying how only the electi and sancti are admitted to the Church of God, and how the ecclesia visibilis has so many evil hypocrites in its membership, he does not make membership absolutely compelling. Nor does he, indeed, provide any clearly stated relation, between the ecclesia invisibilis and the visible signs. The relation is implicit, doubtless, in the person of Christ: namely that the invisible community of the risen Christ is the community of him who was incarnate, who instituted the sacrament, and to whom the Scripture and the Spirit bear witness.

Undeniably a certain gap between the two remains: between the divine and the human, between the elect of God and the members of the visible church. This gap is more definitely expressed than in the 1536 Institutes. To mark it Calvin introduced a sentence from Augustine: According to the secret predestination of God, many sheep are outside the visible church, many wolves within (secundum occultam Dei praedestinationem ... plurimae sunt foris oves, plurimi lupi intus).<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, he brought in the iudicium charitatis as the means of recognising individual members of the visible church as members of the real Church of Christ, and there are more certain signs (certiora nota) whereby we may

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<sup>1</sup> COS 5,13; the reference is to Joh Tract 45,12

know where the body of Christ (notitia corporis) is: Word and sacraments. This knowledge is more necessary (magis necessaria) for our salvation.<sup>1</sup>

For the rest, the 1543 Institutes reflect the advances in organization of the ecclesiastical ordinances: the grounding of the ministry in Scripture, according to a threefold classification of teachers and pastors, ruling elders, and deacons;<sup>2</sup> and the practical erasure of mediaeval clericalism by incorporating laymen into definite ministerial offices.<sup>3</sup> Discipline is introduced for sanctification, and for keeping teaching pure. More fundamentally, discipline is necessary (following Bucer) since all that damages the community of Christ, affects him as head of the body (especially in the community of the Lord's Supper).<sup>4</sup> Practically, Calvin shows a social sense of the importance of environment in determining moral habits and social behavior<sup>u</sup>, far beyond that of Luther.<sup>5</sup>

Against Rome, he added long sections. On the one hand he denied the Roman claim that Christ, the Holy Spirit and the church are Bound (alligare) to a place (loco), namely Rome.<sup>6</sup> On the other, he again allows that there are churches (ecclesiae) among the Romanists.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> COS 5,13

<sup>2</sup> COS 5,57-8 (Inst 4.4.1)

<sup>3</sup> Wendel, op cit, 231

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 227

<sup>5</sup> McNeill, Unitive Protestantism, NY, Abingdon, 1930, 48.55

<sup>6</sup> COS 5,131 (Inst, 4.7.29)

<sup>7</sup> COS 5,41 (Inst, 4.2.12)

By the Institutes of 1543, Calvin had developed his bi-linear ecclesiology of the ecclesia visibilis and invisibilis. The terms have undeniably a Platonic flavour, and historically were derived from Platonism through Augustine and the Scholastics. The tendency was that two churches result: the real invisible church, and the apparent visible church. But for Calvin the church was one - invisible and visible. Calvin differed from Luther in insisting on the bi-lineal form of the church. It was not invisible church and visible signs; but invisible church of the elect in Christ, and its earthly realization. Both lines were held together in tension. The stress on the invisibility of the church prevented the absolutising of the visible ecclesiastical community; while the increasingly heavy stress on the Body of Christ as realised in the ordered congregation, prevented the church of the elect from degenerating into individualism or abstraction.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Jacobs, Prädestination und Verantwortlichkeit bei Calvin, Neukirchen, Moers, 1937, 85; and P Barth, "Calvins Verständnis der Kirche", in Zwischen den Zeiten, vol 8 (1930) no 3, 230

## IV. THE FINAL POSITION OF CALVIN (1)

In the years following the 1543 edition of the Institutes, Calvin worked out and expressed in different contexts, and on different occasions the view of the church developed during the years 1536-43. In the same year as the 1543 Institutes, there appeared the Supplex exhortatio ad Caesarem Carolum Quintum, etc., in which he described under the term doctrina, the point at which the church emerges into clear visibility. The essential things of the faith are a knowledge of the true worship of God, and of the source of salvation. These come under doctrine (doctrina), which is the soul (anima) of the church. The sacraments and government (gubernatio) supporting doctrine are the body (corpus) of the church, which the soul animates. Doctrine, thus, is exalted, and the sacraments are placed on the same level as rule and discipline (regimen).<sup>1</sup> Doctrine is undoubtedly the Word of God, the Evangelium in Luther's sense.<sup>2</sup>

That doctrine is the basis of the church as a Christ-derived reality is stated also in a work against Pighius, fundatum esse ecclesiam in doctrina. It is the witness of the Apostles and Prophets, the bond (vinculum, nexus) by which the church is joined to Christ.<sup>3</sup> It is the divine-human point at which the church appears. By the human

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<sup>1</sup> CO 6,459-60

<sup>2</sup> Werderman, "Calvins Lehre von der Kirche", in Calvinstudien, Leipzig, R Haupt, 1909, 319

<sup>3</sup> CO 6,327

preaching of the Gospel, God acts through his Spirit, our acts serving his providence. Hence, Solus est Deus qui agit: sed quia spiritus sui virtutem quodammodo in evangelii praedicatione inclusam esse voluit, non vana neque inutilis est nostra opera, quae eius providentiae servit.<sup>1</sup>

Another term used is the form (forma) of the church. And here it is clear that the true form of the church is a visible one. Invisibility or formlessness is the contrary of the will of God for men. Writing to Charles V., Calvin warned that if he delays much longer there will be no form of the church in Germany (ecclesiae formam nos in Germania nullam habituros).<sup>2</sup> And, turning to the radical left wing, he argued that to be without an ordered form of the church (forme d'Eglise ordonnée) is to incur the wrath of God.<sup>3</sup> For if there is no facies of the church, Christ and his church are withdrawn from accessibility.

Also in 1544, Calvin wrote against the Sorbonne. The universal church, he said, is constituted by the Word of God, by Christ. It is the Christ-community. As a man is recognised by his face (facies), so is the church recognised in the face of Christ. Often in history the face of the church, the Word of God, Christ, has been invisible, i.e. when its name was usurped by false believers. Then, to the true believers, such as Elijah, it was also invisible (1 Kings 19<sup>10</sup>).

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<sup>1</sup> CO 6,254

<sup>2</sup> CO 6,532

<sup>3</sup> Excuse de Jehan Calvin a Messieurs les Nicodemites sur la complainte qu'ilz font de sa trop grand rigueur, in CO 6,612, 1544



Similarly where there is defection from the church to-day it is thereby also withdrawn from visibility. When true doctrine (doctrina veritatis) is buried, the church is invisible.

Arguing against Rome, the inner nature of the church as the Christ-community is emphasised, not as a static entity but as dynamic and historical: as the church deprived of her rightful visibility and facies by the adulteration of men. This facies is simply the reflection of Christ. It disappears and reappears in history, but it is always present because Christ is always present by the Spirit and will of God. Hence, where Christ appears, i.e. when his Word appears, there is the church. (Statuamus ergo, videri ecclesiam ubi apparet Christus, ubi verbum eius auditur).<sup>1</sup> Any opposition between the visibility and invisibility of the Christ-community is ruled out by this dynamic, historical conception. A visible and an invisible church are possible only when the church is thought of in static terms. And if it does happen it must be between a false visible "church" and the true Christ-community.

The vehicle by which the invisible Christ-community emerges into visibility is doctrina, or the content of the Apostolic witness: Scripture.<sup>2</sup> By it pastors determine the forms of obedience to the Word. But these forms are only of the external church, and have no rightful claim to infallibility. No facies of the church has historical permanence. For the external form of the church opposed the prophets and had Christ crucified.<sup>3</sup> The external face of the church

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<sup>1</sup> Articuli a facultate sacrae theologiae Parisiensi determinati super materiis fidei nostrae hodie controversis. Cum Antidoto, 1544, in CO 7,31

<sup>2</sup> CO 7,32-3

<sup>3</sup> CO 7,32

(externa ecclesiae facies) institutes excommunication. But the true church (vera ecclesia) never has this for it never departs from the rule of Christ's Word (regula verbi), being always governed by his Spirit. From a false external church (e.g. the Roman) one should not fear to be excommunicated: but from the true church\which has the pure doctrine of God as its bond (vinculum) there is no separation without at the same time forfeiting salvation itself (non enim est salus extra eius communionem).<sup>1</sup> It is a question how far the externa ecclesia and the vera ecclesia are parallels of the churches of Rome and Geneva. How far, for example, did Calvin think of his church as the direct expression of the true church, and how far as having also an externa facies which would be subject to the relativity and transitoriness of all historical forms?

Against the Anabaptists, discipline is spoken of as of the substance of the church. And the external form of the church is stressed. La discipline est aussi bien de la substance de l'Eglise. When there is no good order ("bon ordre", "police", excommunication) then the true form of the church is disfigured, la vraie forme de l'Eglise en est autant disfigurée.<sup>2</sup> Calvin was by no means afraid to construct and defend a new facies of the church on the basis of the doctrina of Christ.

There is undoubtedly development in Calvin's thought

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<sup>1</sup> CO 7,34

<sup>2</sup> Briefve instruction ... contre les Anabaptistes, 1544, in CO 7,68

but it also remains ever the same especially where the church is considered as derived from Christ. He stressed, as in the Psychopannychia twelve years before, that Christ is the bond of unity (vinculum unitatis) and that he who leaves Him violates unity.<sup>1</sup> The unity of the true church flows from the truth of Christ (sincera Christi veritas). It consists of the agreement of mind and doctrine in Christ among all believers ("integer et doctrinae et animorum in Christo consensus cum omnibus piis").<sup>2</sup> But the basing of unity on a consensus of faith in Christ, instead of a juridical Roman unity inevitably drives unity in two directions - visibly, back to smaller forms, invisibly it frees unity for being conferred dominically in a single universal form, co-extensive with the Body of Christ.

Commenting on the "Adultero-German Interim", a document designed to cover over the cracks between Romans and Reformed communities, Calvin rejected Apostolic succession (continua episcoporum successio) as a visible structure to maintain the true doctrine. It is God himself who promises that the church will never disappear. The being of the church is not dependent on, or fixed to external masks (externa larva). It is something that directly springs from Christ. Hence, let us begin with Christ, and let unity in the church be by agreeing to the truth of Christ. (Cur ergo in conside-

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<sup>1</sup> Admonitio paterna Pauli III. Romani Pontificis ad invictissimum Caesarem Carolum V. Cum Scholiis, 1545,  
in CO 7,259

<sup>2</sup> CO 7,264

randae ecclesiae, non ab ipso capite incipimus, praesertim quum eo nos Christus ipse revocet? ... Quare si in certam ecclesiae unitatem coalescere libet, in veritatem Christi tantum consentiamus).<sup>1</sup> If Christ is the constitutive form and ground of the church, then the church cannot possibly be something apart or independent from him. Not does it need Apostolic succession. If necessary the church is preserved by the secret power of God (arcana Dei virtute). It is hidden (latet) and invisible to the eyes of men (fugitque hominum oculos), and it has no visible structure (externum ... regimen aut principatus).<sup>2</sup> There is a strong historical realism here, namely that God works apart from any given pseudo-facies of the church. For, in the world every visible structure may become solely external, and cut off from its source. Nevertheless, if the church is preserved sometimes by the secret power of God alone, then visibility is not necessary to it, and the bond between visibility and invisibility is broken, even in Luther's sense, and is something which comes only in the freedom of God. And yet, for Calvin, this idea was not incompatible with putting the greatest of emphasis on external order deriving from the Word of God. The idea was double-edged, destroying all false visibility, however strong, and restoring true visibility in a militant form. This gave a harder core to the Reformed Church, than the Lutheran could produce.

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<sup>1</sup> Interim adultero-germanum: cui adiecta est Vera christianae pacificationis et ecclesiae reformandae ratio 1549-1550, in CO 7,612

<sup>2</sup> CO 7,637

Calvin had also Luther's favourite idea that the true Church of Christ always appears in humiliation, shining with an internal splendour rather than an external one. The external aspect of the church, he declared, is contemptible that it may shine out interiorly (ut decor euis intus splendeat).<sup>1</sup> This is stressed for the benefit of those who fear to come out openly and face persecution by Rome.

The consequence of placing unity in Christ alone, and of opposing any external juridical unity could only be the springing up of divisions among groups in Christendom each of which had a different understanding of doctrina and of its external structure. But it was accompanied by a hunger for true unity which, as McNeill has shown, was shared by the principal Reformers, and not least by Calvin. Writing to Cranmer in 1552, he considered the fact that the churches are so divided (distractae sunt ecclesiae) as among the greatest evils of the age. Real community (societas) and communion (communicatio) scarcely exists among the members of Christ, and thus being separated (dissipatis) the body of the church is torn apart (lacerum).<sup>2</sup>

There was little to be done, in the face of the forces which used the reformation for political ends, and the Counter Reformation which threatened its existence. Calvin could only lay the basis of unity in the Christ-community, and seek to realise this in the community of the Reformed churches.

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<sup>1</sup> De scandalis quibus hodie plerique absterrentur, nonnulli etiam alienantur a pura evangelii doctrina, in CO 8, 24, 1550.

<sup>2</sup> CO 14, 313-4



A letter to Vermigli in 1555, to which Kolfaus has drawn attention, presented in a short compass the whole doctrine of the Christ-community, as a reality deriving from him, invisible yet always pressing into historical visibility. The question was, how are we united with the risen Christ? The answer is that he makes us to unite with him (in unum cum ipso coalescamus). As soon as we receive Christ by faith, offered to us in the Gospel, we become his member and life flows from him as the head into us. This is the koinonia Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 1<sup>9</sup>. It is that unity by which the Son of God implants us in his body, so that he may share all things with us. Hence, we have life from his flesh and blood, which are our food. It is the Spirit which does this. It is not a question of any commingling of substance (de substantiae commixtione) for the body of Christ remains in heavenly glory. It is rather that life flows from him to us as the sap flows from the root to the branches.<sup>1</sup>

There is a second community (secunda communicatio) that is the fruit or result (effectus) of the first. After Christ has bound us to himself by the inner power (virtute) of his spirit, he gives us his gifts, strengthening us by faith and hope to overcome the world and the flesh. This is the second form of community. Scripture speaks of both forms (partes) -- first, he calls his faithful into the community (communicatio); then, his life grows in them daily (through the communion received in the Lord's Supper).<sup>2</sup> Here, far

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<sup>1</sup> CO 15,722-3; cf Kolfaus, Christusgemeinschaft bei Johannes Calvin, Neukirchen, Kr Moers, 1939, 24ff

<sup>2</sup> CO 15,723

more than in the notion of election is the centre of Calvin's view of the church. If Luther took communio sanctorum as the gloss on ecclesia, Calvin may be said to have taken corpus Christi.

In 1559, the final edition of the Institutes appeared, and gathered together in Book IV, the teaching on the church. The Book is headed, concerning the external means or helps (mediis vel adminiculis) by which God invites us into the community (societas) of Christ, and maintains us in it.<sup>1</sup>

Asmussen suspects Calvin's view because he placed the church under the category of external means.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand the societas of Christ is by no means something external, it is quite central. There is however admittedly an apparent contradiction, between the external helps and the Christ-community, which Calvin could not resolve without absorbing one into the other and doing violence to both. The first sentence here poses the problem that runs right through the section on the nature of the church. At times it seems that Calvin "spiritualised" the Christ-community, and relegated, even the sacraments to the position of useful helps (utilia ... adiu-menta).<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, thinking out from the Christ-community, the church becomes, even in its external form, the mother of all believers, who nourishes and later guides her children into maturity of faith.<sup>4</sup> God's favour rests only on his chosen people, hence to abandon the church entails loss

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<sup>1</sup> COS 5,1 (Inst, 4.1.1)

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B

<sup>3</sup> COS 5,1; Quistorp, op cit, 87

<sup>4</sup> COS 5,1-2.7 (Inst, 4.1.1,4)

of forgiveness and salvation,<sup>1</sup> and even denial of God and Christ.<sup>2</sup> He used also a pedagogical metaphor (similar to Melancthon), the church as a school where we spend all our lives as scholars.<sup>3</sup> Here an external element creeps in. That we are there because of our infirmity, and doubtless have to be disciplined as at school, does not suggest the full stature of the church as the community which began with the Spirit's descent at Pentecost.

The remarks on the visible and invisible character of the church are further amplified. The church of the Creed, the church of faith, is both the visible church (ecclesia visibilis), and also the elect (omnes electi Dei), present and past.<sup>4</sup> The church has to be believed because often there appears no difference between the electi and the profani.<sup>5</sup> We know only that the Word is not without fruit. The church is derived directly from the death of Christ,<sup>6</sup> its members being absolutely invisible and distinguished from the reprobi by God's own seal (signaculo) and insignia.<sup>7</sup> They are a small and contemptible number hidden (latet) under an immense crowd, like a few grains of wheat buried among a heap of chaff. Only God alone knows the church of the elect (solī Deo permit-tenda est cognitio suae Ecclesiae, cuius fundamentum est arcana illius electio).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> COS 5,7 (Inst, 4.1.4)

<sup>3</sup> COS 5,7

<sup>5</sup> COS 5,2

<sup>7</sup> COS 5,3

<sup>2</sup> COS 5,15 (Inst, 4.1.10)

<sup>4</sup> COS 5,2 (Inst, 4.1.2)

<sup>6</sup> COS 5,3

<sup>8</sup> COS 5,3-4

When the membership of the church is under discussion election comes strongly into the foreground, and the church becomes absolutely invisible. Yet he would have us identify ourselves with the church of the elect, and persuade ourselves that we are engrafted into it (insiti).<sup>1</sup> And he linked to the idea of election that of concealment under the corrupt visible structure. The church here is the remnant (residuum ecclesiae) hidden and concealed (in latebris).<sup>2</sup> This is not quite the same thing for invisibility is not inevitable as in the case of the church of the elect, but "driven into invisibility by human sin, or in punishment of the latter, withdrawn by God from men's sight".<sup>3</sup> "Mere invisibility", then, "is the abnormality and deformity of what should be the visible counterpart of the perfect pattern". The reformer's task is to bring the invisible to visibility again.<sup>4</sup> Then, finally, under communion of saints the church is described as the Christ-community (societas Christi). It is twofold. Membership in it depends on the mutual communication of the gifts each receives from God (inter se mutuo communicent). Divine incorporation is authenticated in human community.<sup>5</sup>

The church of faith is for Calvin, at once (1) the church of the elect, the church driven into invisibility by human sin, and the church of the Christ-community; and also (2) to some extent (aliquatenus) the external church (externa ecclesia), in which we must remain in unity (in fraterno consensu) with all the sons of God, defer to ecclesiastical

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<sup>1</sup> COS 5,4

<sup>2</sup> COS 5,4

<sup>3</sup> McNeill, op cit, 44

<sup>4</sup> Idem

<sup>5</sup> COS 5,5 (Inst, 4.1.3)

authority, and be good sheep of the flock.<sup>1</sup> Ritschl says that this double view contains a confusion of thought which Calvin shared with Zwingli. The church of faith considers the members of the church as justified by Christ and sanctified by the Spirit. Only the ethical view considers these same believers as on the road to sanctification, among a mixed crowd of sanctified and unsanctified. Calvin thus mixes the dogmatic and ethical views of the church.<sup>2</sup> For Ritschl, the dogmatic view of the church is static. Only the ethical is in movement. But for Calvin the "dogmatic" side is dynamic. It is the community of the living active Christ realising itself concretely in community forms: not absolutely but partially, relatively and historically. Hence these historical community forms of the church were by no means fully the form of the Body of Christ, which would be disclosed only at the end. On the other hand, they were, as a consequence of the Incarnation and Death and Resurrection, Pentecost, the Parousia to come, and the presence of Word and Spirit, to some extent, or a veiled, "cruci-form" of the Body of Christ. Instead of being a confusion, it is rather to take the Incarnation and Christology seriously in relation to the church. It is the church in the world sometimes obscured, covered by scandals, sometimes appearing tranquil and free,<sup>3</sup> that is to some extent the object of faith: not simply an invisible reality visible only in signs. The visible structure is thus rooted in the form of the Body of Christ, but retains its historical relativity.

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<sup>1</sup> COS 5,4-5 (Inst, 4.1.3)

<sup>3</sup> COS 5,35 (Inst, 4.2.3)

<sup>2</sup> Ritschl, "Über die Begriffe: sichtbare u. unsichtbare Kirche", (1859), in Gesammelte Aufsätze, Freiburg, JCB Mohr, 1893



This is worked out at length in subsequent chapters of the Institutes. Christ himself gave the ministry to raise and train up the Body of Christ (Eph.4<sup>10-13</sup>). Hence, rejection of what the church offers is of the utmost peril.<sup>1</sup> For the church has an established form of ministry and discipline. God condescends to honour us by speaking through our words.<sup>2</sup> The church is built on preaching (externa praedicatione).<sup>3</sup> This is the power of God, to descend to us so as to be near us, and nevertheless raise us up to his heavenly glory.<sup>4</sup> God connects his Spirit with the ministry (coniungens) and guarantees its fruitfulness.<sup>5</sup> But the power of God is not confined to the visible structure of the church (externis mediis alligatu non est Dei virtus). It is the ordinary method (ordinario modo) by which he has bound us.<sup>6</sup> Hence he refuses to absolutise (with the Romans) or to disregard (with the Anabaptists) the working of Grace through the visible forms of the church among men. (Dum eius dignitatem hyperbolice amplificat alii, alii contendunt peram transferri ad hominem mortalem quod proprium est spiritus).<sup>7</sup>

According to Wernle, a religious individualism and the early Catholic Gemeinschaftsgefühl are here in tension.<sup>8</sup> There is some truth in this. But more adequately it is a bi-linear conception of the church's invisibility and visibility, united at the centre by the idea of the Christ-community, its life hidden with the risen Christ, its existence in the midst of the world.

<sup>1</sup> COS 5,8 (Inst, 4.1.5)

<sup>2</sup> COS 5,8-10

<sup>3</sup> COS 5,10      <sup>4</sup> COS 5,10

<sup>5</sup> COS 5,11 (Inst, 4.1.6)

<sup>6</sup> COS 5,9 (Inst, 4.1.5)

<sup>7</sup> COS 5,11 (Inst, 4.1.6)

<sup>8</sup> Op cit, 406-7

## V. THE FINAL POSITION OF CALVIN (2)

The exegetical works of Calvin, in the last two decades of his life, serve to provide a conspectus of the main emphases in Calvin's understanding of the nature and appearance of the church.

First of all, the church is described as the body or community of the invisible Christ, not as a fixed institutional structure under an earthly vice-gerent of Christ. Christians do not form <sup>C</sup>some political institution (corpus politicum), but are the spiritual and secret body of Christ (spirituale et arcanum Christi corpus). The church is his complement (complementum); without his members he would be mutilated.<sup>1</sup> It is his own community. He forms it and makes it his body. He joins it to him by an indissoluble knot (coniunctus est nodo insolubili), as the head is joined to the body.<sup>2</sup> In other metaphors, Christ is the universal soul (universalis ... anima) not in respect to essence (essentia) but of grace. He is the fountain of life (fons vitae) from which proceeds all vital energy (omnes vitales motus).<sup>3</sup> In the perpetuity of Christ (as risen from the dead), the perpetuity of the church is assured (ecclesiae potius perpetuitas in persona Christi asseritur).<sup>4</sup> Hence, the church

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<sup>1</sup> On 1 Cor 12<sup>12</sup>, in CO 49,501

<sup>2</sup> On Ezek 13<sup>8-9</sup>, in CO 40,281

<sup>3</sup> On 2 Cor 3<sup>17</sup>, in CO 50,46

<sup>4</sup> On Ac 8<sup>33</sup>, in CO 48,194

shares all Christ has, but he never diminishes or abrogates his authority over her. (Christum ecclesiam suam minime extollere, ut de suo iure quidquam minuat vel abroget).<sup>1</sup>

In the church itself, the members form an organic community. By the communication of Christ's substance they coalesce into one body (substantiae eius communicare, et hac communicatione nos coalescere in unum corpus).<sup>2</sup> The church thence becomes a community of mutual sharing and living together (que nous communiquons tous ensemble).<sup>3</sup> It is in this sense that the church is an object of faith, under the invisible kingdom of God (invisibile Dei regnum);<sup>4</sup> not because it is in heaven, or out of the world (non quae coelo sit inclusa, non quae sit quaerenda extra mundum), but because it originates from heaven, and in the grace of God. The church is invisible, but diffused through the world, and living in the world. (Est enim diffusa ecclesia per totum orbem et in terra peregrinatur).<sup>5</sup>

Then, second, the church is preserved directly by God, without the assistance of men. This again is in contrast to God's redemptive activity being fixed to a particular human institutional channel. If the church is the spiritual kingdom of Christ, he can in a miraculous way preserve his own:

En somme L'Ecriture sainte nous monstre, que d'autant que l'Eglise est le Royaume spirituel de nostre Seigneur Iesus Christ: qu'aussi il y veut besongner d'une façon miraculeuse, quand il est question de le conserver. (6

<sup>1</sup> On Ps 45<sup>11</sup>, in CO 31,457

<sup>2</sup> On Eph 5<sup>29</sup>, in CO 51,225

<sup>3</sup> Sermon on Job 4, in CO 33,183

<sup>4</sup> On Jn 20<sup>29</sup>, in CO 47,445

<sup>5</sup> On Gal 4<sup>26</sup>, in CO 50,239

<sup>6</sup> Sermon on Dt 11<sup>1-4</sup>, CO 27,7

It may look as if the church were overwhelmed by the world, yet God propogates it and extends it continuously to eternity. Hence we must not judge it according to its appearance (ex praesenti rerum aspectu), but by the promise of God that it will so continue and increase.<sup>1</sup> Otherwise, God is a liar and everything in Scripture is false!<sup>2</sup>

Not only, however, does God preserve the church by unknown methods (incognitis rationibus),<sup>3</sup> but he even inverts the usual order of nature (usitatum naturae ordinem invertit) in carrying forward his Heilsgeschichte (ubi de salute ecclesiae agitur).<sup>4</sup> He opposes the Spirit to all earthly aids, and employs his power alone. He does use other means, of course, but we have to be dependent on him, not on the ordinary means. We must make room, for the extraordinary use of God's power.<sup>5</sup>

The means by which God chooses to bring his church into being are not a visible human or institutional succession, but the Word of the Gospel (quia non aliunde ecclesiam suam gignit Deus et propogat nisi ex verbo). Only the preaching of the Grace of God (sola gratiae Dei praedicatione) keeps the church from perishing.<sup>6</sup> The Gospel is the sceptre of Christ's kingdom - an image dear to Luther - and the church is only

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<sup>1</sup> On Isa 9<sup>7</sup>, in CO 36,199

<sup>2</sup> On Isa 2<sup>1</sup>, in CO 36,59

<sup>3</sup> Idem

<sup>4</sup> On Gen 21<sup>12</sup>, in CO 23,302

<sup>5</sup> On Zech 4<sup>1-6</sup>, in CO 44,184

<sup>6</sup> On Ps 22<sup>30-2</sup>, in CO 31,236-7

truly formed (bene composita) when Christ thus rules over it.<sup>1</sup> When the Word of God has its true place, then the true order for the ruling of the church (legitimus ordo regendae ecclesiae) is possible. This is, that God alone presides and his authority (imperium) alone prevails.<sup>2</sup>

If Calvin made much use of the term "doctrine" (doctrina) as the basis of the church, it is only in this sense, for God in Christ is the foundation of the church (nam proprie unicum fundamentum est Christus). By the preaching of doctrine the church is established in Christ (in Christo fundatur).<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, doctrine as one of the signs (notae) of the true face of the church (vera et genuina ecclesiae facies), is equated with the Gospel, as the soul of the church. Wherever this is heard and professed, there is the church.<sup>4</sup>

The Kingdom of Heaven, Calvin interpreted as the renovation of the church such as was in the days of the Incarnation beginning to emerge by the preaching of the Gospel.<sup>5</sup> The Gospel is not confined to the New Testament. It includes the witness to Christ in Moses and the prophets. The Gospel is the sign that God rules in the church (Quand donc nous avons cette verité là, nous sommes certains que Dieu regne au milieu de nous).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On Hos 1<sup>11</sup>, in CO 42,221

<sup>2</sup> On Obad 21, in CO 43,200

<sup>3</sup> On Eph 2<sup>20</sup>, in CO 51,174-5

<sup>4</sup> On Ac 2<sup>42</sup>, in CO 48,57

<sup>5</sup> On Mt 5<sup>19</sup>, in CO 45,172

<sup>6</sup> Sermon on Daniel 8, in CO 41,482



The preaching of the Gospel, Calvin believed, included the government of the church. This was a sacred ordinance of Christ, an unalterable law, whereby Christ raises up pastors, as he chose the apostles.<sup>1</sup> At the same time the power of judgment is conferred on the whole people.<sup>2</sup> Order, moreover, includes discipline.<sup>3</sup> Hence, from the preaching of the Gospel follows the entire establishment and ordering of the church, under the rule of God. At this point, the church is at the farthest remove from any Platonic invisibility.

In the third place, the church is buried, and hidden from the eyes of men, at certain stages in history. God wished to reflect in the person of Abraham, for example, whence and how his church should emerge from being hidden like a dry root (in arido trunco) under the earth.<sup>4</sup> We must learn not to judge whether there is a church or not, by our eyes. For God often buries it like grain buried under a heap of chaff. The faithful appear exterminated but they are nevertheless preserved. The church is not seen in numbers or in outward splendour. God alone knows his own.<sup>5</sup> At one time he seems to bury them, at another he raises the church up as if from death (a morte),<sup>6</sup> or from a tomb (sepulchro).<sup>7</sup> He preserves the

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<sup>1</sup> On Eph 4<sup>11</sup>, in CO 51,196

<sup>2</sup> On Mt 18<sup>16</sup>, in CO 45,514

<sup>3</sup> On Col 2<sup>5</sup>, in CO 52,101

<sup>4</sup> On Gen 11<sup>30</sup>, in CO 23,171

<sup>5</sup> Sermon on Melchizedek, in CO 23,650

<sup>6</sup> On Hos 1<sup>10</sup>, in CO 42,217

<sup>7</sup> On Ezek 16<sup>53</sup>, in CO 40,387

church, again, without a visible form (non visibili forma conservat). It is hidden (abscondita) and afterwards emerges (emergat), recovering its dignity when it had been seemingly extinct.<sup>1</sup> A remnant (reliqua) always remains though the face of the church (facies ecclesiae) seems to have disappeared (nulla apparet), and to be invisible (oculis nostris non pateant).<sup>2</sup> At this time the elect are "hidden under his wings" (absconditos sub alis suis) out of sight (absconditam ab hominum oculis).<sup>3</sup>

This conception referred directly to Calvin's own day. As the Pharisees lost the truth and the church became deformed, so under the Papacy. Both the Jews and the Papists declared that the church was with them because of God's covenant. But God passes them by and the church continues in concealment and invisibility. Under the Papacy, thus, there was nothing but confusion, desolation and dispersion for the true church, over many centuries.<sup>4</sup>

Related to this, is the idea of the church as living under the oppression of her enemies, without and within. The church is attacked by outward enemies, but being the spiritual kingdom of Christ, (spirituale regnum Christi) these attacks are directed against her by Satan himself. As long as she continues on earth she will have to live among enemies.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On Jer 36<sup>29-30</sup>, in CO 39,137

<sup>2</sup> On Isa 17<sup>6</sup>, in CO 36,314

<sup>3</sup> On Ac 23<sup>7</sup>, in CO 48,508

<sup>4</sup> Sermon on Dt 1<sup>34-40</sup>, in CO 25,691; on Mt 3<sup>9</sup>, and Lu 3<sup>8</sup>, in CO 45,118; Calvin, Isaiah, Calvin Translation Society, I, xxii

<sup>5</sup> On Lu 17<sup>1</sup>, in CO 45,48

Calvin shared Luther's view of the inevitability of strife in the realm of the church itself. In almost every age, the keenest enemies are those within (domestici).<sup>1</sup> These are the false brethren (adulterii fratres, degeneres Christiani).<sup>2</sup> Again, the conflict is seen as God's means of keeping his church dependent on his power alone.<sup>3</sup> And it was a view, that was formed and confirmed by the treatment of Reformed congregations under the hostile State, and under the Church of Rome. Consider the Preface to the Commentary on Daniel, for example:

It does not escape me, while I pass by the numberless fires of 30 years, that ye have endured very great indignities during the last 6 months. How often in many places an irruption was made against you by a ferocious populace, and how often ye were attacked at one time by stones, and at another by swords! How your enemies plotted against you, and repressed your peaceful assemblies by sudden and unlooked for violence! How some were slain in their dwellings, and others by the wayside, while the bodies of your dead were dragged about as a laughing stock, your women ravished, and many of your party wounded, and even the pregnant female and her offspring pierced through, and their homes ransacked and made desolate. (4

Fourthly, the church is invisible and hidden under the form of the Cross. Commenting on Isaiah 61<sup>10</sup> "For he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation", he writes that nothing of this is visible or apprehendable by the senses. The church of Calvin's day had no beauty, rather was contemptible in the eyes of the world under the loathsome dress of the Cross (sub deformi crucis habitu). We need faith to perceive the

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<sup>1</sup> On Jn 13<sup>18</sup>, in CO 47,312

<sup>2</sup> On Ps 83<sup>8</sup>, in CO 31,776

<sup>3</sup> On Gn 49<sup>24</sup>, in CO 23,607

<sup>4</sup> CTS, Daniel, I, IXXI

invisible things (invisibilia).<sup>1</sup> Again, speaking in the context of his own small and weak church (qui sumus et pauci numero et potentiae fere nullius), he describes the church as contemptible before the world (Ecclesia enim est contemptibilis coram mundo),<sup>2</sup> or as having its glory covered with a sordid veil (sordido velamine) so that it is ridiculed by the impious.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes being under the form of the Cross refers to the facies of the true church, sometimes it also covers the whole realm of the church, including the devastated church. In some places in the world, worship (cultus) is more pure, but elsewhere the Word of God is trampled down, worship profaned, and his holy temple demolished. Even the small churches (ecclesiolae) where God dwells are torn and dispersed (laceratae ... ac dispersae). Yet we must love the stones and dust of the church, leaving the pomp and splendour to Rome.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly men cannot discern the church with the eye (non possunt cernere oculis ecclesiam) because it is concealed (in latebris) in men of no estimation (quorum nulla est aestimatio).<sup>5</sup> The wisest of men miss the dignity of Christ's kingdom because, contrary to our judgment, its life is in death, its riches in poverty and want, its glory in shame and disgrace, and its members, heirs of the world, are

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<sup>1</sup> On Isa 61<sup>10</sup>, in CO 37,379

<sup>2</sup> On Micah 4<sup>11</sup>, in CO 43,361

<sup>3</sup> On Gen 33<sup>6</sup>, in CO 23,451

<sup>4</sup> On Ps 102<sup>15</sup>, in CO 32,68

<sup>5</sup> On Ezek 11<sup>14-16</sup>, in CO 40,237

vagabonds (peregrinari in mundo).<sup>1</sup> We look for it in splendour, but it consists in the dregs and refuse of the populace (vulgi faece et quisquiliis).<sup>2</sup> Many leave the church because it contains imperfection and vices. They despise it because "we are obscure men and of no great importance", few and contemptible in number.<sup>3</sup> They look at it with carnal eyes not the eyes of faith.

The church, in this sense, is invisible, not only because of the judgment of God on human sin, but because it is the "cruciform" of the Kingdom of Christ in the world. Though the church is made to sit with Christ in heavenly places, on earth it lives in lowliness and suffering, in expectation of the open manifestation of his glory.

Fifthly, the church is invisible, not only in respect of its head, its foundation, its appearance in history, and before the world, but also in respect of its membership, i.e. the true members of the Church of Christ are not known with any absolute certainty. For the elect are the only true members of the church (electi ... soli sunt genuini ecclesiae filii). They alone are drawn by the Father, endowed with real faith by the Spirit through the grace of Christ.<sup>4</sup> Now it is true that all who are admitted by faith into the church, and separated from the world, are called the elect by a judgment of love, not of faith (caritatis, non fidei iudicium). But

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<sup>1</sup> On Dan 7<sup>27</sup>, in CO 41,82

<sup>2</sup> On Mt 11<sup>25</sup>, in CO 45,317

<sup>3</sup> On Haggai 2<sup>1-5</sup>, in CO 44,101

<sup>4</sup> On Jn 6<sup>45</sup>, in CO 47,149



many fall away, having no real faith (mera ... dissimulatio).<sup>1</sup> This is because their election is temporal. They are given gifts of the Spirit, which are afterwards withdrawn.<sup>2</sup> The eternally elected are elected in the secret counsel of God (ex abscondito Dei consilio)<sup>3</sup> before the foundation of the world. Nevertheless all are at any given moment reckoned as elect because they are sanctified and regenerated by the Spirit of God. Those who fall away, whatever their pretensions, are excommunicated by the Spirit (ab ecclesia Dei exterminat).<sup>4</sup>

The incorporation of the elect into the church is marked by stages: first, gratuitous election (electio gratuita); second, the passing into the tutelage of Christ; then, third, collection through faith into the fold of Christ. The Word of God has then firmly taken root, and Christ becomes their sure guardian and security (certitudo).<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere this process is simply called rebirth. No one is united to the church unless previously made new (renovatus, secunda nativitas).<sup>6</sup>

While Calvin held fast to the judgment of love by which all professing and apparent believers are numbered among the elect, in which case the membership of the church is virtually coextensive at least in part with the outward community of the church, he was at the same time aware of the distinction which

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<sup>1</sup> On 1 Pt 1<sup>1</sup>, in CO 55,207

<sup>2</sup> On Jn 13<sup>18</sup>, in CO 47,311

<sup>3</sup> CO 55,207

<sup>4</sup> On Ps 50<sup>5</sup>, in CO 31,498

<sup>5</sup> On Jn 17<sup>6</sup>, in CO 47,379; see Bohatec, op cit, 269

<sup>6</sup> On Jn 3<sup>3</sup>, in CO 47,54; and on Ps 87<sup>5</sup>, in CO 31,803

this judgment conceals. And elsewhere he became preoccupied with the presence of hypocrites. One distinction he employed is that of calling and election. The church is in a two-fold way (bifariam) the work of God: generaliter, by external calling, and specialiter, by spiritual regeneration, in the case of the elect. The covenant of grace covers all, and all are said to be renewed and regenerated (refingi ac regenerari). But interior regeneration belongs only to believers.<sup>1</sup> All share the name of church (omnes communiter competit ecclesiae nomen), but in the secret sanctuary of God (arcana Dei sacra-  
rio) are only the true believers. This difference comes from the fountain of gratuitous election, the hidden counsel of God. We can only distinguish the true from the false by the signs of faith and of unbelief (fidei et infidelitatis nota).<sup>2</sup>

Calvin also distinguished formally between the external church and the true church (externa ecclesia, vera ecclesia). The difference depends, he said, on God himself, and on his grace alone (mera ... gratia). He declares his election in regeneration and sanctification, and this alone separates the external from the true church.<sup>3</sup> The distinction was drawn partly from Calvin's study of Old Testament history. Many hypocrites in Israel gloried in their membership of the church, but God reckoned only the true Israelites (veros Israelitas). Israel is thus twofold (duplex), those with the title, and the elect, the remnant of Grace (reliquae gratiae).<sup>4</sup> He spoke

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<sup>1</sup> On Dt 32<sup>6</sup>, in CO 25,361

<sup>2</sup> On Gen 17<sup>7</sup>, in CO 23,238

<sup>3</sup> On Dan 12<sup>1</sup>, in CO 41,289

<sup>4</sup> On Ezek 20<sup>40</sup>, in CO 40,509

of the external church (exterior ... ecclesiae status) as a plantation. There are some leaves and fruit, but when they degenerate they are rooted up by the hand of God.<sup>1</sup>

Hypocrites, he continued elsewhere, have always been mixed in the church (permixti sunt). It is their wont to judge the church from its external mask (ab externa larva).<sup>2</sup> They confidently apply the promise of God to themselves, and think that after Christ has once been made known, his grace remains fixed (defixam manere gratiam), and cannot be taken away, whatever the impiety of men.<sup>3</sup>

Calvin adopted, in consequence of the presence of so many hypocrites (hardly one in a hundred worship without hypocrisy!),<sup>4</sup> a "synecdochical" view of the church - and here he is thinking of the whole visible expression of Christendom including the Papacy. In the corrupted church (ecclesia corrupta), the whole church is called the people of God because of a few pious and whole-hearted Christians (pii et integri) that are present in it.<sup>5</sup> The part is taken as the whole, per synecdochem.<sup>6</sup> He applied this to the Galatian church. There were some real Christians in Galatia. Also in Corinth there were a few good men amid a vast multitude of the ungodly (improbi). But, the presence of real Christians was not sufficient to make these communities churches. It needed the signs of the true church (verae ecclesiae signa) in Word and Sacraments.<sup>7</sup> However, Rome is different from Galatia

<sup>1</sup> On Jer 11<sup>16-17</sup>, in CO 38,120

<sup>2</sup> On Isa 1<sup>28</sup>, in CO 36,55

<sup>3</sup> On Joel 2<sup>32</sup>, in CO 42,578

<sup>4</sup> Idem

<sup>5</sup> On Ps 50<sup>4</sup>, in CO 31,497

<sup>6</sup> On Gal 1<sup>2</sup>, in CO 50,170

<sup>7</sup> On 1 Cor 1<sup>2</sup>, in CO 49,307; and on Gal 1<sup>2</sup>, in CO 50,169

and Corinth. There we see no structure at all of the church (aedificium), only ruins and devastation (miseras illic ecclesiae ruinas et horrendam dissipationem).<sup>1</sup> It has become a false church (larvata ecclesia).<sup>2</sup>

It was a constant theme of Calvin that the visibility of the church must be restored: the Christ-community extended on earth, its "face" seen brightly by the preaching of the Gospel, and administration of the sacraments; and its members sanctified and purified in their lives. The words "restoration of the church" (restitutio ecclesiae) occur like a refrain. For an example, taken at random, Isaiah 49<sup>20</sup>, "Shall say in thine ears" - "Isaiah promises the restoration of the church."<sup>3</sup> The defection of the visible church, (visibilis ecclesiae defectio), is followed by a restoration out of utter ruin.<sup>4</sup> Even in the early days in Genesis, when "the church" is in ignoble and contemptible clothing, as if "creeping on the ground", Calvin looked forward to the time when it would lift up its head.<sup>5</sup> Earlier still, writing on Genesis 4<sup>26</sup>: when "the church" consisted only of Adam and Eve and their children in a "rightly ordered family", the face of the church began to appear (exstare coepit distincta ecclesia facies)!<sup>6</sup>

Throughout many commentaries, especially e.g. in that on the Psalms, the church not the individual is taken as the one addressed by God's word. Even Ps. 111<sup>17</sup>, "He hath regarded the prayer of the solitary" is interpreted as the dispersion

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<sup>1</sup> CO 50,170

<sup>3</sup> CO 37,208

<sup>5</sup> On Gen 10<sup>1</sup>, in CO 23,158

<sup>2</sup> On Mt 21<sup>42</sup>, in CO 45,597

<sup>4</sup> On 2 Thess 2<sup>3-4</sup>, CO 52,196-7

<sup>6</sup> CO 23,103

of the church (fideles), who are without lawful assemblies (legitimi conventus). God will hear them, if they join in longing for the restoration of the church.<sup>1</sup> Finally, those who have no form (forma) of a church (Word and sacraments) ought to see themselves as cast out from the presence of God. They must desire only the renewal (instauratio) of the church.<sup>2</sup>

Restored to visibility, the church becomes the mother of all believers, not only as the Christ-community of the elect but in the visibly constituted community. Outside it is no salvation (extra corpus Christi et piorum societatem nulla cum Deo reconciliatio speranda est).<sup>3</sup> The child of God is a child of the church (Quisquis ... in numero filiorum Dei haberi volet, sit filius ecclesiae).<sup>4</sup> The way of regeneration is by the ministry and medium of the church.<sup>5</sup> Entrance to the church is itself a kind of second nativity.<sup>6</sup> The Gospel, Sacraments, and order, are the mirror in which Christ is seen.<sup>7</sup>

In his sermons Calvin dealt with the necessity of going to church and observing its ordinances.<sup>8</sup> On the one hand he was careful to point out that God is not bound to the means he has chosen, but he has chosen these means and we are bound to them. For example, in the Quatre Sermons of 1552, he said almost violently:

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<sup>1</sup> CO 32,69

<sup>2</sup> On Isa 48<sup>19</sup>, in CO 37,187

<sup>3</sup> On Isa 33<sup>24</sup>, in CO 36,578

<sup>4</sup> On Isa 49<sup>18</sup>, in CO 37,207

<sup>5</sup> On Gal 4<sup>26</sup>, in CO 50,239-40; and on Ps 87<sup>5</sup>, in CO 8,448-9

<sup>6</sup> CO 8,448-9

<sup>7</sup> Sermon in CO 8,426-7

<sup>8</sup> CO 8,418



Vray est que la grace de Dieu n'est point attachée, et la vertu de son Esprit n'est point enclose ni aux Sacremens, ni à toutes choses externes, qu'il ne puisse besongner, quand il luy plaira, sans nul moyen: mais yei nous traictons de l'ordre perpetuel qu'il a mis en son Eglise, et non pas de ce qu'il faict extraordinairement comme miracle. Tant y a que ceulx qui sont privez de l'usage des Sacramens et de la liberté de pouvoir invoquer son nom, et ne sentent point leur mal et misere pour en gemir, sont plus stupides que les bestes brutes. (1

In general, in his exegetical works he passed frequently from the invisibility of the church's essential nature, to its visibility in the emergent facies of the church. He did not often formally distinguish the two sides.<sup>2</sup> The church is even sometimes like Christendom consisting of the ruined "church" of the Papacy and of the small reformed communities. He wrote from a standpoint within the corpus Christianum. He did not identify the church with any particular organised body. It has its membership in all nations, and its form wherever Word and sacraments are. It is both an institution and a community of believers bound under a sanctifying discipline. It could veer off into a formal orthodoxy or a Puritan rigorism: it was capable of becoming a Volkskirche or an organisation of ecclesiolae in opposition to the state.<sup>3</sup> Calvin's view was not as simply stated as Luther's, but throughout it took account of the necessary community character and structure of the church.

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<sup>1</sup> CO 8,414

<sup>2</sup> Werderman, op cit, 330-1

<sup>3</sup> Henderson, The Nature of the Church, Aberdeen, The University Press, 1948, 37-8

## S u m m a r y

Calvin's view may be summarised as follows:

1. The church is invisible because it belongs to the realm of faith. It is grounded in the promise of God that where Word and sacraments are, there is the Church of faith; and what is believed cannot be seen in the same way as any res carnalis of this world. But, the visible form of the community thus constituted also belongs to some extent (aliquatenus) to the Church of faith.
2. The church is invisible as the community or Body of the risen Christ. But, this Body realises itself in concretely ordered congregations on earth as the Spirit transfuses the life of the risen Head into the earthly members.
3. The church is, further, invisible because it comprises those eternally elected, and known only by God. But, these are corporately elected in Christ, incorporated into his Body, and have their election effectualised in the life of faith in ordered communities of believers. Here, Word and sacraments and discipline obtain, and here membership is determined according to the judgment of love (iudicium caritatis).
4. The church is invisible and hidden under sin, humiliation and suffering, under false forms of the church, and under the form of the Cross. But always it shows by its growth and discipline that its Lord is not only the Crucified, but also the Risen and Triumphant One at the right hand of the Father.

5. The church is invisible and hidden from the eyes of men at certain stages in history. It is invisible then because it lacks a visible form, or facies, or a true form or facies. But such invisibility is contrary to the will of God for men. He wills for men a visible form in Word (doctrina), sacraments, and a rightly ordered community.

6. The church is, therefore invisible, but always visibly formed on earth. The invisibility of the church is subordinated to a bi-lineal, invisible-visible conception of the form of the church. As Calvin's thought developed the emphasis moved from the side of invisibility to that of visibility, and at the same time the tension between the two sides was accentuated. The dynamic movement of self-incarnation in the former tends to overcome the tension, but only at the Parousia will it disappear. Accordingly Calvin's interest was more and more the restoration of the true form of the church.

7. The church, therefore, does not simply possess an invisible form separated from all external forms, with visible signs in Word and sacraments, but it has irreducibly the invisible and the visible form of the Body of Christ.

## CONCLUDING COMPARISON AND EVALUATION

### I

The development that lies in the thought of Luther and Calvin on the nature of the church is within a basic unity. In attempting a comparison of their conceptions of the invisibility of the church it is assumed that the greatest weight is to be laid upon their mature views, while taking into account the earlier developments. This means in the case of Luther that less emphasis is to be given to the sharp opposition of the church as an invisible communio to the visible structure of Rome, during the earlier years 1518-20, and more to the final view of the church as hidden, and made visible only in the signs of Word and sacraments. For Calvin, it means that the fully developed double-line view of the church as the invisible elect, and as visibly realised, united in the conception of the Christ-community, is to be taken as the mature view, and less importance given to earlier views where this double-line was not brought out so clearly.

In the comparison that follows a number of loci are selected to indicate something of the fullness that for both men lay behind their conception of the invisibility of the church:

The invisibility of the church meant, first of all, the church placed under the Lordship of Christ. As such, it was invisible, whereas ruled by men it assumed a false

visibility. The church has no earthly head. Luther maintained this at the outset, to the point where he could not see any extensive ecclesiastical authority. And throughout he held that Christ alone ruled his church through the preached Word and sacraments. Calvin went a stage further by making Christ's sovereignty a constitutional principle: i.e. he allowed no constitutional provision for a single earthly head or ruler. His ground was that such rulers can and do tear the Body of the church away from its risen head. Under the principle of cuius regie eius religio, precisely this happened. Political rulers determined the mode of religion for their subjects.

The invisibility of the church as under the Lordship of Christ was thus differently conceived by Luther and Calvin. The Lordship of Christ to Luther was an invisible ruling in the Word over a spiritual Hörreich. For Calvin it included the element of distance and executive authority. Through Christ, God was lord over his church, and the visible community never simply coincided with the Christ-community. Nevertheless, both Luther and Calvin maintained the idea of the invisible Lordship of Christ always in the context of the Cyprianic dictum extra ecclesiam nulla salus. The visible community of Word and sacraments was the place where we come under Christ's rule.

Under Christ's lordship the church is invisible as a Divine fact. Luther opposed the church in its invisibility to all human, visible actions taken to realise the church as a divine fact. Thereby he broke with the mediaeval assumption of a divine-human historical continuity in the institut-



ional church of Rome. The opposition of the invisible geistlich church to all human activity as such was by no means complete. It was partly to make clear the essential nature of the church, and, partly, to exclude all actions not done in faith, and therefore not geistlich, from the sphere of the church proper.

Calvin again conceived the church as a divine fact differently. It was doubly a divine fact: as the elect Christ-community, and as that community realised in the visible community of believers. It was a divine fact already accomplished in the Risen Christ, and it was the struggling, sinful, suffering community working out their sanctification. The church as a divine fact was for Luther analogous to the hidden presence of Christ in and under Word and sacrament; but for Calvin it was as Christ's Body already in glory, yet while on earth as the servant of men.

The invisibility of the church, in the third place, is caused by the constitutive character and divisive action of the Word. Luther made this point with unwearying insistence. The church is the creature of the Word, not its patron. As such the church is invisible. But as the patron of the Word it is a "visible church". When the Word is constituted as the church's creator it acts through preaching and sacraments selectively and divisively. Always calling forth the response of faith or of unbelief, it separates believers from unbelievers. The believers, the communio sanctorum, are alone the church, and the church in this sense is invisible. For Calvin too, the Word was constitutive of the church,

though he conceived of the Word more in relation to the activity of the Spirit in history. The selective action of the Word was, again, in the context of men's election as eternal or temporary.

It is obvious that the invisibility of the church in this sense is not platonic, for the Word and Spirit act in the context of preaching, the sacraments, and those gathered as a community about them. Nevertheless the objection is seriously made that Luther (and Calvin) by founding the church on the Word projected their own subjective understanding of the Word into an objective form and so emptied the conception of the church of its meaning, or greatly impoverished it.<sup>1</sup> However, it is a question whether it is in fact an impoverishment when the "riches" of the teaching office and church tradition are abandoned for the "narrowness" of the Apostolic and prophetic witness in Scripture. Moreover if the "fullness" of the Word stands over the subjective understanding of it, through Christ's mediation of his life through it by the Spirit, then it cannot be simply a question of psychological projection. Only when the Word is narrowed down to a certain doctrinal formulation, is the Biblical fullness impoverished. Only then can the idea legitimately obtain that Protestantism is a dependent corrective to Catholicism.<sup>2</sup> But if the Word is seen as the fullness of Christ, and in its historical character, as event, pressing towards the fullness of God, then far from being an impover-

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<sup>1</sup> See Lortz, Reformation in Deutschland, 394

<sup>2</sup> "Are not Catholicism and Protestantism related to each other like ... a building which cannot stand, to a buttress which cannot stand alone?" (Kierkegaard, Journals, London OUP, 1938, no 1327)

ishment of the church, the views of Luther and Calvin imply that the Word-constituted church bursts its institutional forms by a power that is inherently universal.

The church is invisible, fourthly because it is in the passing world, but not of it. The church as sub contra-ria, regnum absconditum and sub cruce is invisible. Just as the new man, the new creature in Christ, is hidden under the old, so the church is hidden under the world, and under the world which is in the "church". For both Luther and Calvin, the invisibility of the church in this sense occurred in the context of conflict. The world was not merely a place, but a power, the power and rule of sin and Satan, in active hostility to the church as the new creation of God. In this conflict Christ's victory was accomplished but not yet openly manifest. The church was the group of those who adhered to the hidden Word of victory and forgiveness and justification despite the assaults of Satan. Behind this conception ran the experience of Luther and Calvin in the persecution by the official church and State authorities of those cleaving to the Gospel.

In their formulation of the church's invisibility sub cruce, Luther and Calvin differed. For Luther, the Word and the church were hidden under the larvae of the world until the end. Only marks of the submerged church are visible. This view was accompanied by a progressive pessimism and Apocalypticism, such that the church as communio sanctorum takes on an almost Platonic character, and its incarnate character is undermined to the verge of docetism. Calvin had

less of the pure theologia crucis, and more of the theologia resurrectionis. The church in history as the Body of Christ possessed a vera facies which though driven into invisibility by sin and deformity, tended always to emerge into openness. This was because the church though in tribulation on earth, was at the same time with the risen Christ in glory. And the wide tension between the two statuses of the church led to a positive world-transforming element. Calvin's conception of the invisibility of the church was not of a completely invisible church, but of one which tended to emerge into visibility, though always with its form sub contraria.

The invisibility of the church also derives from the "unknowability" of its real members. These are the elect believers, the sancti. The church was not an ecclesia mixta, nor were the sancti invested visibly with an indelible sanctity, nor were the means of sanctification dispensed ex opere operato by a saving institution, nor was a fides implicita in this institution sufficient for real membership. Luther held that the invisible communion of saints was with the preached Word and sacraments. Calvin held that the Body of Christ was invisibly, and also in part visibly present where Word and sacraments and an ordered community were. But neither allowed that all who were there were sancti.

The sancti for Luther were the true members of Christ's communio and were known only to God and Christ. They were the justified, and were absolutely invisible i.e. unknowable. Their justification was strictly a matter of belief not of

sense or experience. Nor was the whole visible congregation imputed righteous or holy. Within the visible community were the unknowable justified believers. And even these as sinners were invisible to themselves. There are traces of the idea in Luther that a "horizontal" experiential relation exists among members of the communion of saints, and that their confessions of faith cause a visible community to arise. But this is not Luther's main emphasis. He held that it is the Word alone which through these confessions creates the invisible communion of saints, but the Word, not some visible communal experience, is the sign of its presence. The presence of the sancti is not experiential, but neither it is mere logical deduction from the promise of God. It flows from the living faith in Christ, and the fideist experience of his Grace. It is the same faith that underlies one's own certainty of belonging, by the grace of God, to the communion of saints.

In practise, Luther held, one lived in the visible congregation and reckoned by a judgment of love all those to be fellow sancti who belonged to the group cleaving to the Word. Calvin stressed this proximate standard more by his notion that the ordered community of Word and sacraments was visibly, in part, the true church of faith. But Calvin, like Luther, insisted on the sharp distinction between Israel after the flesh, and the invisible Israel of God. The basic notion ensuring the unknowability of the sancti for Calvin, was that of election.



Luther had little interest in election of individual persons run back into the will of God. For him the persons and individuals of the visible congregation were larvae. Election was in terms of Word and sacraments. They were the assurance of election, they were not something interposed between the believer and God. But for Calvin the fact of election placed the church under God alone, and relegated to a subordinate place the "extraneous supports" of Roman institutionalism. The sancti as the electi were known to God alone, and were therefore invisible.

Again it is to be noticed that the invisibility of the believers or elect, does not imply an atomistic dissolution of the church as community. As the justified for Luther lived in dependence on God and in service of the fellow members of the visible community, so the elect<sup>for Calvin</sup> were corporately elected in Christ, and their election was ratified by justification, adoption, faith and sanctification in the organic visible community which is the Body of Christ. What does appear is the irreducible gap between the elect in Christ, and the visible community in which election is materialised.

The invisibility of the communio, or relation between the sancti was different from that of the sancti themselves. It involved Luther's distinction between geistlich and körperlich. In its specific form, this idea is more characteristic of Luther than of Calvin. It consists of two elements: First, both Luther and Calvin held that there was a world-wide communio among the sancti which included a common sharing of material and spiritual goods. They tend to push this idea to

the point of abstractness, at times, but undoubtedly it had its ground for both in the actual experience of community and brotherhood, and was a powerful legacy from the dominant mediaeval idea of the corpus Christianum. Then in addition, Luther stressed that this was not simply compounded of ordinary, körperlich ethical activity, but being a product of faith, and in the Spirit of God, it became geistlich and invisible. Luther seems to have been more content with this relation of communio as such. Calvin's interest was more in its ordered, disciplined expression in definite communities.

The church was invisible for both Luther and Calvin as the Body of the invisible Christ. It was not to be simply identified with the outward structure of the worshipping community. For Luther the church as the Body of Christ took the form of its Lord as the suffering servant. And Christ ruled it and renewed it through his Word and sacraments. It had for Luther, however, no concrete form or necessary expression in ordered communities. This was important for Calvin, who conceived of the church as the Body of Christ in a broader more dynamic form whereby the risen Christ incorporated men into his Body, and their incorporation was realised in concrete community forms.

The invisibility of the church, again, represents the liberation of the conception of the Kingdom of God or Christ from its mediaeval canalization in the institutional structure of Rome. But as the Kingdom of Christ, the invis-

ible church was no speculative ideal, nor was it a primitive futuristic hope. It was quite simply the elect and justified of Christ, living by Word and sacraments, and awaiting the open manifestation of the Kingdom when the King shall come in person. For Luther, the Kingdom of God, and of Christ <sup>was</sup> were identical with the church. They all were the area of God's rule by Word and Spirit. The Kingdom of Christ, Luther distinguished from the Kingdom of Satan, which was in conflict with it, and from the Kingdom of the World or weltliches Regiment, which was created by God and ruled over by God through his larvae, the Obrigkeiten. The irruption of the Kingdom of Satan was seen by Luther when these two Regimente, the Kingdom of Christ's Word, and that of the Obrigkeiten were confused. When the Hörrereich of Christ was subjected to human rule and authority, then its very nature was contradicted and imperilled.

Calvin likewise spoke of the Kingdom of God and of Christ, but somewhat differently. The Kingdom of God was his active world-wide intervention in the lives and history of men, to make room for his church to grow, and to discomfit the enemies of the truth. The Kingdom of Christ was not, as with Luther, distinguished from the Kingdom of the World, but was innerly differentiated as the Kingdom realised in the form of the first Advent, and as the Kingdom in glory. This double character, Luther also recognised, but Calvin emphasised more that the church is the Kingdom already accomplished and victorious, i.e. with the risen Christ, although continuing in the outward form of Christ's humiliation while on earth.

A further characteristic of the invisibility of the church is its dynamic not its static state. The church as formed by Christ through his Word and Spirit is essentially dynamic. This operates in a double way: on the one hand it creates a gap between the church and the historical forms in which it has been clothed. The members of Christ's Body are never wholly served by relative, ambivalent institutions which preserve and inevitably depreciate what is entrusted to them. And on the other hand the church dynamically unifies its invisibility and its visibility, i.e. the static "distinction" is in the living context of the movement of the church, bridged over.

Statically regarded Luther's conception of the church can be interpreted in terms of concentric circles of visibility and invisibility, or of coincident circles, or finally as an objective visible institution with an invisible formless communio sanctorum within it. There are tendencies towards a static view in Luther's work against Alfeld in 1520. The Leib/Seele analogy, the material "church", the idea that the church of the body while creating no believers, yet has believers in it - all these things suggest a static view of concentric circles. Later Luther came to see the church as being involuta in carne, with the unity provided by the dynamic nature of the church in its invisibility. But for Luther the church was never completely united with its bodily form. It never became "flesh and blood"; its persons, community and institutions were always larvae.

If Calvin's view of the church's invisibility also is divorced from its dynamic character, his conception of the church falls apart into irreconcilable dualism, or at best into overlapping circles. There is an "invisible church" of the elect, and a "visible church" of Word, sacraments, and the ordered congregation. But if Christ is the active creator of his church working out the election of his followers in the community through Word, sacraments and discipline, then the "face" of the invisible church emerges, as Calvin said, ever more brightly into visibility and the unity of the church is preserved.

If the invisibility of the church is related to its dynamic character, how closely is it also related to the church's form, and to what extent<sup>†</sup> does the church, in its invisibility, contain a community-forming and "church"-building power? It has been maintained that for Luther the communio sanctorum was completely opposed to all form. The church was not a community of faith; it was not church-building; and it did not have the power of materialising itself. The end of the world was near, Antichrist was enthroned, and all questions of external form were indifferent. Luther, thus, it has been argued, wanted no new independent form to supplant the old one of Rome, this form could be supplied from the only available source, the State. The invisible communio sanctorum, so runs the conclusion, had for Luther no constitutional or socio-ethical creative power.



On the other hand there are those who hold that for Luther the church did contain an inherent community-forming power. It "materialised" itself, and thus Luther's thought found its true expression not in the Landeskirche but in the churches of Strasbourg and Geneva. It has been claimed also that the church in its invisibility was according to Luther dynamically social and ethical. It was a conception in the service of concrete ecclesiastical reform. It also envisaged a free personal community, an objective experienced community even.

Others again argue that Luther's conception in relation to the form of the church changed radically during the course of his life: at first as embodied in a reformed national church, then in individual ordered congregations, and finally in the Volkskirche under the existing political authority.

If we keep simply to Luther's main and repeated view of the church, it cannot be denied that the church has a form for Luther, but that form is the form of the Servant. The church is ruled by the preached Word of the Cross. The justified live out Christ's sacrifice in ministerial service of their neighbours. The church as geistliches Regiment has no structure of political and juridical authority, that would be to confound the two regiments. But it does have a community-forming power. The Word produces community but, and this is Luther's weakness, perhaps, the community is never more than the larva of the communio sanctorum. It lacks a firm integrated constitutional community expression.

For Calvin on the other hand, the church in its invisibility is the Body of Christ, not the communio sanctorum, and it contains as such a firm community forming power. Form is part of its nature, and its form as a Servant is constitutionally expressed by its subordination to Christ alone. Its order ensures that alien structures cannot lightly reduce the communio of the church to abstraction or perversion.

What both Luther and Calvin agree on, however, is that the church in its invisibility is never bound to the body of external Christianity. It can, in the last resort, exist apart from it, i.e. its members, though excommunicated, may nevertheless remain in the body and community of Christ. This does not of course involve an immediate non-church conception of the relation between the believer and God. The former has the Word and baptism.

The nature of the invisibility of the church varies also with the viewing subject, i.e. whether the church is considered from the Divine or the human point of view, or from the standpoint of the believer or non-believer. From the Divine point of view the church is one, and its members are surely known by God and Christ. Christ, and only he knows his flock. For all men, therefore, the church in this absolute, final sense is invisible.

Luther also - indeed mostly - considers the church from the point of view of the believer, not the unbeliever. And he describes it as at the same time invisibilis and

perceptibilis per fidem. It is invisible to the senses, but is apprehended through faith. It is seen from within outwards, and what is not the church of faith does not come into consideration. Calvin also described the church from the point of view of the believer. But for him the ecclesia invisibilis was aliquatenus in emergent visibility in the outward societas. The basis of this measure of visibility was the fideist "judgment of love", the presence of Word and sacraments, together with the promise of God that they are not without fruit, and the fact that the societas is also object of faith precisely in its visibility.

For neither Luther nor Calvin was the church two communities, an inner invisible one, and an outer visible one. Such a bifurcation is possible only when one considers the church from the point of view of the unbeliever, i.e. scientifically and descriptively. Then the church is analysed into the inner invisible group of believers, and the outward form, institution or community. It is a political or sociological entity, with an inner core of faith. Actually, however, such a conception misses the central and essential nature of the church as derived from Christ. As has been pointed out, from this point of view the real church tends to be completely invisible because the presupposition of faith is lacking.

In connection with the consideration of invisibility according to the point of view, the terms form and

content have been used for the church. It has been said that in Luther's conception the two are related as follows: The Word is met in its visible form, and through it is mediated the invisible Divine content. This Divine content includes the invisible content of the church as deriving directly from Christ. Only then can the believer perceive the visible form of the church in the experienced communion of saints. Such an analysis of the church into invisible content and visible form tends to borrow categories which are foreign both to Luther and to the Bible. For Luther the church was a whole; it was created and formed by God and it appeared under larvae in the form of a servant. It was a dynamic, Divine reality, and was incapable of being speculatively analysed. It was as little analysable in static terms of content and form as a person is. It was simply Christ's Kingdom in the outward form of a Servant.

Related to the idea that the invisibility of the church is to be described in terms of the distinction between content and form, is the conception of the church as comprising the inner and outer sides of a historical institution. One believes that the institution that one sees is also an invisible reality that one cannot see. The pivot about which the distinction turns is the historical institution. It is said on the one hand that Luther's view approximated to this in his Soul/Body distinction. The church as Soul was the invisible communio sanctorum, and as Body the politico-ethical structure. In this case the weight inevitably falls on the latter. On the other hand,

in the effort to move the point of emphasis more to the centre, it is asserted that the inner and outer aspects are related as nature and Spirit. Nature is the "visible" of Spirit: Spirit the invisible of nature. The ethical and political institution is the "visible" of the communio sanctorum. The danger in these "horizontal" analytical attempts is that a spiritual aspect is postulated distinct from the politico-ethical community. And that underlying this is a conception of a fundamental "spiritual" relation between the individual and Christ where the centre is in the religious consciousness of the individual. For Luther, and also for Calvin, the centre lay in the creative power of God by the Word and Spirit, a power which called forth the obedience and service of believers. The centre was not in the institution but in God's personal activity in forming his church. It was thus institutional and historical, but the institution was not the basic "givenness". This was the free power of the Word and Spirit, in the Body and community of Christ.

By the invisibility of the church is meant, however, not the erection of a "spiritual community" distinct from the institutional structure, but the de-absolutization of that structure. This included the politico-juridical form and constitution, its liturgy, dogmatics and ethics. All were subordinated to the Word of God. The decisive moment for this was 1518 with the publishing of the Sermo de Excommunicatione. It went beyond Augustine and the Pre-reformers and Conciliarists. For the first time Luther and



his sympathisers were prepared to find the reality of the church in the Word and, if necessary, outside the organised structure of the Papacy. The latter was no longer the church. The whole line of Roman institutionalism was rejected. Slowly Luther came to see that a new form based on the universal priesthood of believers was necessary. But for the details he claimed no finality. He accepted and even encouraged local differences. Calvin also had no rigid dogmatism, although he sought to evolve a constitutional structure more explicitly drawn from Scripture.

The Reformers' de-absolutization of the institutional structure has led to a variety of constitutional forms, an almost chaotic variety. But in this the basic intention was not a false individualism, nor a blind hostility to Rome, but the setting up of a tension between the fullness of Christ and the given historical structure. The resolution of this tension was henceforth possible only by moving toward a more universal form consonant with the free creative action of the Word. Absolutely it could be resolved only at the Parousia.

By the invisibility of the church was included its strict universality in space and time. The church was no sect. It covered the world and history. Any given congregation of believers was only a part of an invisible whole. But the whole was present in the part, and precisely the whole was intended not an overaggrandised part. It was thus ecclesiola in ecclesia, and ecclesia in ecclesiola.

This ruled out the claims of Roman sectarianism. For while the Pope claimed the legal title to the whole world, and divided the new regions between Spain and Portugal, in actual fact his jurisdiction stopped short of the Greek and Russian and Bohemian churches.

Its existence was also universal in time, i.e. it extended from the foundation of the world until the Parousia. It included the Church triumphant as well as the Church militant. Luther and Calvin placed heavy stress on the church as existing before Christ, and they were more concerned with the historical course of the church, than with its heavenly complement of saints. The Old Testament, not only pointed towards Christ and the church and spoke of these in figures and allegories, but actually was a record of the history of the church from the first "congregation" in Eden. This congregation split when Cain murdered Abel, and became the true church of the Promise and the false church of work-righteousness, the larva ecclesiae, which reappeared constantly and threatened to subvert the true church. However, the church remained throughout, and the Word was never without fruit, as Is 55<sup>11</sup>, constantly recalled, declared. It was through its universality in space and time, impossible to confine to a priestly institution, i.e. to a part or sect of the church.

The invisibility of the church also stood in some sense as the ideal of the reformer who is confronted by the sordid actuality. It was not an ideal in the humanist sense

of an ethical idea, nor in the mystical sense of a personal, immediate vision, but in the Biblical sense of a norm derived from the Apostolic witness to Christ and His Kingdom. Nor was it something that lay beyond merely in the future. It was at once past, present and future.

Lastly, the invisibility of the church was the refuge of the individual against the tyranny of an ecclesiastical order which has turned on the authentic Gospel and its adherents. It is here that the charge of individualism and subjectivism comes close to being justified. The charge of Roman Catholicism against Luther is that he pitted his conscience against the church's whole tradition. Luther also was aware of this interpretation of his refusal to abandon "the Word of God". This is individualism in the sense of prophetic individualism. Its justification is only the authentication of the living Word himself. It is always exposed to the weighty charges levelled by the approved and traditional. If the church builds itself from within outwards, and is not produced and renewed by the institutional structure as such, then prophetic individualism is integral to Christ's redemptive activity in the world.

## II

Some general questions must be raised. Each is a separate study in itself and no exhaustive treatment can be given. The most that is attempted is an outline and a tentative answer.

The first question is, to what extent is the assertion of the church's invisibility historically conditioned? To what extent e.g. is it an anti-Roman polemic?

The corruption of the Roman Church made the incongruity of its claims to be in continuity with the New Testament Church too great for Luther and Calvin. Augustine met this situation in his own day when the Donatists withdrew in protest: He formulated a distinction between the true Body of the Lord (corpus Domini verum), and the mixed body (corpus permixtum). Luther and Calvin were forced to reject the claim of the legally-ordered Roman Church to be identified with the Body of Christ; and so to assert the invisibility of the latter. On the other hand, against the Donatist protest of the Anabaptists they insisted on the visibility of the church as manifested by objective signs.

It is natural to suppose that the two-sided polemical orientation was carried over somewhat into the heart of the idea of the church's invisibility; and that, accordingly, this conditioned the conception so that under changed historical circumstances it no longer as originally formulated, exactly met the demands for which it was put

forward. Ranke affirms this when he says that the moment when an idea is produced has an inevitable and permanent effect on its whole existence. It lives on under the same conditions which attended its birth; e.g. the church after the rejection by Luther of Lambert's constitution, and with its form determined by the reigning princes.<sup>1</sup> Kohlmeyer also, makes this point when he refers to the tragedy that the Lutheran conception of the church lived really for only a single moment of history; and that his successors had to substitute other pieces - moral, or legal, to prevent it from vanishing away.<sup>2</sup>

In the historical environment in which the church had become corrupt, external and hierarchical, Luther reacted by asserting its invisibility. This placed the church under the visible external, hierarchical authority of the State. He correctly employed the church's invisibility as a weapon against the "over-visible" church, but he failed to retain the weapon of the church's visible authority against the authority of the ruler. It was also needed, and this Luther could not in the first Apocalyptic enthusiasm be expected to realise, against the de facto level of behavior of the justified sinners who comprised the church, and in whose midst the invisible communio was to be realised.

In the light of the deeper meaning behind the church's invisibility, however, it would not be wrong to

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<sup>1</sup> Ranke, op cit, II, 489.483-9

<sup>2</sup> Kohlmeyer, op cit, 511



assert that the historical conditioning of the conception was not determinative nor was it the origin. It exercised a strong influence, but is not an exhaustive explanation of the conception.

The next question is whether the invisibility of the church, and the distinction between its visibility and invisibility are grounded in Scripture. It would be fair to say that for Luther and for Calvin these were a product of their total grasp of revelation, rather than being drawn from isolated proof texts in Scripture. However, while they presented no systematic Scriptural proof, evidence for the idea is not lacking.

In both parts Old and New Testaments occurs the distinction between the true people of God and the whole people of God descended outwardly from Abraham. Part of the latter are always falling into disobedience and part remain faithful. In Ex. 32<sup>25-34</sup>, the people make an image and worship it; but the Levites elect to join Moses and the true God. In Isa. 10<sup>20</sup>, there is a reference to the remnant of Israel, a term used by both Luther and Calvin. This remnant is concealed among the whole mass of the people in days when idolatry is rife. 1 Kgs. 19<sup>18</sup> and Rm. 11<sup>1-5</sup> are commonly cited in this connection. Nevertheless there is a sense in which the whole of Israel is for all its rebellion the people of God (Dt. 14<sup>2.21</sup> 26<sup>19</sup>; Nu. 16<sup>3</sup>). Hence, the distinction in the people of God. This is seen, according to both Luther and Calvin, in the

double election operating in the church of the Old Testament. The latter was really the church not a prefiguration, hence it is normative for our understanding of it. There is first the general seed of Abraham, the whole people. Then there are the elect, who alone are really saved. This corresponds to outward circumcision, and to circumcision of the heart (Rm. 2<sup>29</sup>). Thus Luther could speak of the false external church, and of the true church; and Calvin could take over Zwingli's visible-invisible church distinction confident of its Biblical correctness.<sup>1</sup>

The New Testament spoke even more clearly of the church's invisibility and of the distinction that was made in the Old Testament. Luther many times adduced Mt. 16<sup>18</sup> as evidence of the Headship of Christ, and of the church as the Communio Sanctorum. Both men used Paul's analogy of the church as the Body of Christ (Eph. 1<sup>22-3</sup>, 5<sup>23</sup>, 4<sup>3-16</sup>; Col. 1<sup>18.24</sup>, 2<sup>19</sup>), as the Bride of Christ (Eph. 5<sup>32</sup>), and as the building of which Christ is the corner stone (Eph. 2<sup>19-22</sup>; cf. also 1 Pt. 2<sup>5</sup>). The distinction in the actual congregation of believers is suggested by the living and dead branches of the vine (Jn. 15<sup>2.5-6</sup>), and the distinction between calling and election (Mt. 20<sup>16</sup>, 22<sup>14</sup>). More certainly referring to the church is the case of Ananias, who was in the community but of an alien spirit (Ac. 4<sup>34-5</sup>, 5<sup>1-20</sup>). Paul also distinguishes between vessels of honour and dishonour (11 Tim. 2<sup>20</sup>). If the Kingdom of Heaven be

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<sup>1</sup> O. Ritschl, Dogmengeschichte, III, 222

identified with the church, as it was by Luther and Calvin, then two parables of Jesus refer to the presence of true and false members side by side until the Judgment Day; the wheat and weeds are explained as referring to the children of God and of the Devil; and a simile is used of a netting of good and bad fish (Mt. 13<sup>24.47-50</sup>).

It must be acknowledged first that this distinction between a real and an external membership of the people of God is not central but peripheral in the Bible. The latter is concerned with God's revelation and its appropriation and proclamation among men. The church is involved primarily at this point. There is no interest in the invisibility of the church over against a visible structure. But also too, as has been shown above, the conception of the church's invisibility does not consist for Luther and Calvin merely as one term of a distinction. It stands for a fundamental view of the church. And this view, if allowance is made for the historical conditioning of the conception, is grounded implicitly, though not explicitly in a Biblical doctrine of the church.

A third question is to what extent the invisibility of the church as formulated by Luther and Calvin is found in their doctrinal precursors and contemporaries.

Augustine's view influenced the Reformers to some extent. With a Pauline recovery of the doctrine of sin and grace, he was forced to differentiate in the institutionalised church between the saints (sancti) and nominal

members, and also to guard the church against the perfectionist attempt of the separating Donatists. His view of the church comprised three elements: First, the corpus permixtum, the institution of salvation, with entry by baptism and the sole area of salvation; second, the communion of saints, an ethical community of love; and, third, the numerus predestinatorum, who are elected by God whether they are of the first corpus or outside it. Augustine, like the Reformers, makes a definite distinction in the nature of the church (corpus Domini bipartitum),<sup>1</sup> and he refers to the invisibility of the true church (... ex illis ergo omnibus, ut ita dicam, intrinsecus et in occulto intus sunt, constat ille hortus conclusus).<sup>2</sup> This is an invisible company of charity (quum intus videntur, ab illa invisibili caritatis compage separati sunt).<sup>3</sup> However, this was by no means thought out in Luther's sense as the communio sanctorum, or in Calvin's as the Body of Christ.

Wiclif caught up the predestination strand in his sharp protest against Papal corruption. He had also a three-fold conception of the church: as a convocatio fidelium of reprobate members (praesciti), who have a temporary righteousness and grace, an ecclesia mixta<sup>a</sup> of these together with the predestined; and an ecclesia predestinatorum, the true church.<sup>4</sup> This last is the corpus Christi mysticum comprising the church militant, triumphant, and in

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Krauss, op cit, 5 from the de Doctrina christiana

<sup>2</sup> Corpus Scriptorum, 51,295

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 218

<sup>4</sup> Seeberg, Begriff der Kirche, 70-1

purgatory. Only these are saved. The church of the predestined is opposed to the organised church, and is founded on the decree of God. No one "wots whether he be of the church" but he hopes that he is "a limb of holy church".<sup>1</sup> In practise, these seemed to be the godly and virtuous,<sup>2</sup> and there is a bond of love which unites them.<sup>3</sup> Being independent of the organised church the ecclesia predestinatorum had an individualist character, whose only check was Scripture. But it allowed a place to the laity beyond anything Calvin or still more Luther were prepared to give.<sup>4</sup> Krauss approves of Wiclif's formulation of such a pure dogmatic definition;<sup>5</sup> McNeill stresses the fact that it was a "real entity", though with an "indeterminate relation" to the organised church.<sup>6</sup> And Seeberg sees it as an uncontrolled statement of Augustine's view of predestination, an ideal unrelated to the present realities of faith and life, and bypassing the means of grace.<sup>7</sup>

Hus reproduced Wiclif's ideas in often identical phraseology. The church of faith for Hus is the totality of predestined, (the convocatio predestinatorum is the church articulus fidei).<sup>8</sup> Then, because election always

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Workman, in his John Wyclif, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1926, I, 9-10

<sup>2</sup> Seeberg, op cit, 70

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 69-70

<sup>4</sup> Workman, op cit, 19-20

<sup>5</sup> Krauss, op cit, 10-12

<sup>6</sup> McNeill, op cit, 25

<sup>7</sup> Seeberg, op cit, 72

<sup>8</sup> Krauss, op cit, 13



issues in holiness, the church of faith is realised in the present church when faith, hope and love exist in its members. The church as an ethical fellowship contains a mixture of predestined and of non predestined members. The recognition of the former is not open to the sensibilibiter judgments of men because predestination is confirmed only by perseverance - and of this no certainty exists. On the other hand believing members can recognise by faith the existence of those who are "limbs of Satan". There is also a sense in which the church is used for the congregatio or convocatio, a group of relative believers not part of the church of faith or the corpus mysticum. The nature of the church's fellowship, its bona communicatio vel communio is described as participation in Divine grace, the sacraments, and in all things with Christ (suffragiorum participatio). This is the communio sanctorum qui sunt corpus Christi mysticum, because of which we say credo communionem sanctorum.<sup>1</sup>

The question arises as to the nature of the relation between the church of the predestined and of the ethical community, the body of Christ. Ritschl claims they are bound together closely.<sup>2</sup> But Seeberg sees the emergence of an invisible, Platonic no-church with no real relation to the historical actuality.<sup>3</sup> The predestination idea, for him, leads to individualism, and the attack on sacerdotalism

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Krauss, op cit, 17

<sup>2</sup> Ritschl, Gesammelte Aufsätze, 71-2

<sup>3</sup> Seeberg, op cit, 74

destroys the church as a historical reality. The means of grace in the church have no relation to the ideal church. The source of confusion lies in making the criterion of membership central, and not the nature of the church. The result is two churches. Hus's object, however, was to improve the old corrupt church. He had no desire to destroy the historical reality of the church as centring in the Word and sacraments. Nor, according to Gottschick, is his idea without affinity to Luther's at one point, namely where the church is conceived as a pure spiritual communion bound together in faith, hope and love, and scattered throughout the world.<sup>1</sup>

The conciliarists also transferred the infallibility of the church to its spiritual side thus foreshadowing the Reformers' emphasis on the invisibility of the church. The church had no infallible organ of interpretation. Hence each council had the right to review the decisions of previous ones, in the light of Scripture, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> The views of the Conciliarists were absorbed by Luther, but there is little sign he read William of Occam's works personally. Nor was he acquainted until his views were already formed, with men like the conciliarist and nominalist, Wessel Gansfort.

Wessel sharply opposed the Papacy, put the true unity of the church in the communio sanctorum, of faith, hope and love scattered through the world, and in a measure

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<sup>1</sup> Gottschick, op cit, 565-6

<sup>2</sup> McNeill, op cit, 98-9

independent of the external church. The following quotation illustrates his position and shows a similar stress to Luther's though without the latter's positive stress on the Gospel, and the historical means of Grace of the church:<sup>1</sup>

"All the saints share in a true and essential unity, even as many as unitedly hold fast to Christ in one faith, one hope, one love. It matters not under what prelates they may live, or how ambitiously these prelates may display, or disagree, or wander from the truth, or even become heretical. It matters not by what distances of space or what intervals of years the saints may be separated. This is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, concerning which we say in the Creed: 'I believe in the Communion of Saints' ... Hence the unity of the church under one Pope is merely accidental." (2)

The pre-reformers were on the fringe of mediaeval thought: to what extent were Luther and Calvin influenced by the main current? Luther's conception of Christenheit and the communio sanctorum has a measure of affinity, apparently, at least, with the communio fidelium which existed within the external church of the Middle Ages. His total view of the two regiments has also, though not convincingly, been traced to the corpus Christianum and Gelasian theory of the two swords.

More directly, the idea of the invisible, sub contrario, corpus Christi has been traced to the late Scholastic, Biel, who conceived of Christ as ruling the church militant as a man, i.e. in weakness and humiliation, while

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<sup>1</sup> See Seeberg, op cit, 67-8

<sup>2</sup> Wessel Gansfort, Farrago Rerum Theologicarum, in Wessel Gansfort: His Life and Writings; and Principal Works, edd. Miller and Scudder, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1917, 2, 203.205.249-50

he ruled the church triumphant as God. Within the view of the communio of believers, is also found the mediaeval Catholic notion of the intercession of saints, and the influence of monasticism. Both Luther and Calvin were not without some continuity with the mediaeval church as an institution: Luther in insisting solely on the objective signs of Word and sacraments (later extended to seven signs), and Calvin in insisting on discipline and definite offices by which the Body of Christ assumes an openly visible form.

With Zwingli we come to the contemporaries of Luther and Calvin. Zwingli's thought on the church, and in particular his statements on the invisible church, did not precede Luther's but followed, though for the most part independently. In 1523-4, Zwingli referred to the invisibility of the church where it is formed of those who believe in Christ, scattered all over the earth. It appeared visibly in particular congregations (Kilchhören) in which the true Christians are hidden though conscious of their status through faith. Later he defined the invisible side in terms of election, which some such as Seeberg, have seen as a regression to individualism, but which Zwingli himself kept in subordination to the idea of the church as a gathering. The church's visibility also was extended to include the churches, apart from Rome and Anabaptism, which confessed Christ, have the Word and sacraments and discipline, but whose members may or may not be Christian.

In 1531, Zwingli recast his conception in terms of the basic visible-invisible universal church. The invisible side referred to the believing, predestinated (fideles soli

Deo et sibi perspecti). The visible side was all those in the world confessing the true faith. Zwingli held this to be one church innerly differentiated. Seeberg argues that in fact it is two because the ideas of predestination (which includes pagans) and the visible order of the church in confession and sacraments are logically incompatible. Krauss more soundly criticises the abandonment not only of the invisibility of the church as a Raumkategorie, but the adoption of a universal form for the visible-invisible church which destroys the community nature of the church. The invisible church is a contradictio in adiecto. Nor was it wise to drop the idea of the single congregation (Kilchhören), Krauss judges; while Sohm asserts that the congregational principle (where the power resides in the group) was alien to the New Testament and in fact, was abandoned in Zwingli's practise. Luther had, of course, no specific role for the particular congregation, but Calvin adopted Zwingli's approach, though without the latter's stoic thought and speculative tendency.<sup>1</sup>

Mysticism seems to have exercised some influence on Luther, but virtually none on Calvin. Luther's initial break with the "corporate state" of Rome, required the individual intensity of the mystic. His view of communio as self-sacrifice resembled the annihilation of the mystics, but he had no sympathy whatever, in common with Calvin, with mystical immediacy.

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<sup>1</sup> See Ritschl, op cit, 58 ff; Krauss, op cit, 20 ff; Seeberg, op cit, 79 ff; and Sohm, op cit, 635 ff



The views of Bucer exercised an undoubted influence on Calvin, particularly during and after the latter's stay in Strasbourg. Calvin did not altogether share Bucer's conciliatory policy toward the reuniting of the church. Nor does he have so keen a missionary zeal to win back not only the heathen but "lost sheep" such as the Anabaptists. But Calvin did adopt in considerable measure Bucer's emphasis upon the nature of the church as the community and Body of Christ, growing up under the bonds of love and discipline, as well as being nourished by Word and sacrament. The whole process of "Seelsorge" inevitably gave the church an inner strength and autonomous character in society as a whole, and made it a conscious means for leavening it.<sup>1</sup>

Bucer defined the church in 1538 as the gathering and congregation, (versammlung und Gemeinde), of those who in Christ are assembled and united through his word and spirit to form one body. In this body they are members one of another (durch einander) and each has his office (Ampt) and works towards the common furthering (gemeiner besserung) of the whole body and of all the members. He made a serious effort to show the plain scriptural basis of this view of the church and stressed the threefold nature of its unity and community: in Christ, in one another through the Spirit, and in leibliche form in everyday life.<sup>2</sup> Practically, this was achieved by maintaining

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<sup>1</sup> Von der waren Seelsorge, 1538, passim

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, I

the principle of the sole headship of Christ, and by seel-sorge and Kirchendienst of the pastors and doctors, the elders, and the deacons, the visible instruments (befindliche Werkzeuge) of their invisible (unbefindliche), risen Head. Calvin's Institutes of 1543 reflect Bucer's views by their insistence on both sana doctrina and fraterna caritas, by the stress on discipline, and above all by the conception of the innermost nature of the church as the community and Body of Christ, which emerges into visibility as the restored face of the New Testament Church.<sup>1</sup>

From this sketch of some of Luther and Calvin's doctrinal precursors, the conclusion may be drawn that Augustine, mediaeval Scholasticism, and the Conciliarists, for Luther; Augustine, and Bucer for Calvin, all exercised some influence. But Luther's decisive element, the church as the invisible communio of the Word, and Calvin's of the church as the bi-linear conception of the Body of Christ were in their final form, their own creation.

The next question is whether the emphasis on the invisibility of the church preserves its unity, or instead undermines its visibility? Both Lutheran and Calvinist interpreters have been anxious to show that Luther and Calvin preserved the essential unity of the church; Luther, according to Seeberg and others, by the insistence on the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, passim, see also Strohl, "La Notion de l'Eglise chez les Reformateurs", 279-88.305-311; and R. Seeberg, Dogmengeschichte, IV/2, 554-5

means of Grace as the common pivot of the visible and invisible sides, and Calvin, according to Bohatec, Niesel, and Kolfaus etc., by the Christ-community which overcomes any individualistic tendency in the invisibility of the church. The preoccupation of modern interpreters is influenced by the condition of contemporary Protestantism, with its legacy of division, and the Aufklärung platonisation. Luther and Calvin were in no such position. They unhesitatingly dragged apart the visible and the invisible sides over against Rome, just as they maintained their unity over against the Anabaptist's spiritualisation.

The real relation they substituted was that of the Word or the Gospel of Christ realised in the community of those in whom Christ dwells by his Spirit. Their concern was not then with any loss of reality to the visible side, but solely with the Gospel and with the dynamic tension between it and the world.

It is when the dynamic character of the Word, and its embodiment in the church as the new creation is lost, that all the problems of visibility and invisibility in the church arise. Then Luther's view appears, as under Orthodoxy, in concentric circles of invisibility and visibility. And the criticism of has point that his "nominalism" which divorces religious reality from human experience and cognition leads to an ineradicable dissolution of the visible and the invisible, the material and the spiritual in the church. On the other hand, Calvin's thought is seen as involving overlapping circles. The visible community of

sacraments and Word and discipline, and the invisible one of the elect, known only to God, and lacking any actual community. Both have an inner "invisible" church of faith and the Spirit, and an outer visible one of the sacraments. The result is that the proper tension between the Word with its creation, the church, and the world (without and within) is diverted into a sterile differentiation between an invisible entity and a visible church entity, between a spiritual and covertly platonic "fellowship" and a political or legal institution. This debate has led to one party accusing the other of being the originator of the distinction - Calvin, by Lutherans, because of the predestination idea; Luther, by Calvinists, because the church is separated from all constitutional structure.

For Calvin and Luther, there was no double ecclesiological reality. What then can be said then of the unity between the visible and invisible sides? That it is established by God and not a historically permanent datum. But it is something already achieved in Christ, and eschatologically present, but hiddenly and in humiliation under the passing forms of this world. On the other hand we cannot expect to find an "invisible church" where there is no visible one, nor vice versa! There is no scattered community, less invisible church of individuals. For Christ's followers are the organic human historical body of which he is the invisible, risen Head.

Within this common ground, Luther and Calvin differed. Luther grounded the unity of the church specifically and

solely in the preaching office (Predigtamt). It was founded by Christ, as the instrument of God's direct presence. It prevented any spiritualising of the church, and welded together the inner nature and outer institutional form. The church was thereby involuta in carne. But the bodily form was a larva, there was no real incarnation of the church, no necessary relation between the church in its invisible and visible sides. The two were together but antinomous. With Calvin on the other hand, discipline was added to secure the unity of the visible emergence of the church, and it was thought of as really incarnate in the visible societas.

In view of the historical conditioning of the conception of the church's invisibility, the question of the retention of the terminology must be raised.

The terms invisible and visible as applied to the church are coming more and more into disfavour. Their disappearance need not, moreover, cause concern; and even their excision from credal statements might not be at all prejudicial. They may once have been understood in their proper context, but now any right understanding is scarcely possible. The terms as such were never central to Luther and Calvin. They were never used to describe systematically the church's nature.

The chief reason against their retention is that while Colossians 1<sup>16</sup> speaks of visibilia and invisibilia, the terms are also Platonist in origin and history, and as



such tend to draw in a certain Platonic content. This justified the criticisms made from Bellamine on and opened the door to a resurgence of Platonism under Orthodoxy and the Aufklärung. The singling out of the terms has been unjustified from the point of view of the thought of Luther and Calvin and the New Testament as a whole. K.L.Schmidt rightly points out their origin in the introduction in the first centuries of speculative elements; the preexistence of the church and its supra-worldly part: the church triumphant and ideal.<sup>1</sup> Hence the Platonic gulf between idea and actuality which has lasted on into the present age. This is illustrated in the distinction once made by Karl Barth in his commentary on the Romans:

"By its theme the church is divided into the church of Esau - where no miracle occurs and where, consequently, men are exposed as liars precisely when they hear and speak about God; and the church of Jacob - where miracle is, and where, consequently, the truth appears above the deceit of men. The two churches do not, of course, stand over against one another as two things. The Church of Esau alone is observable, knowable and possible. It may be seen at Jerusalem, or Rome, or Wittenberg, or at Geneva. The past and the future can be comprehended without exception under its name. The Church of Esau is the realm where failure and corruption may be found, the place where schism and reformations occur. But the Church of Jacob is capable of no less precise definition. It is the unobservable, unknowable and impossible church, capable neither of expansion nor of contraction; it has neither place nor name nor history; men neither communicate with it nor are excommunicated from it. It is simply the free Grace of God, his Calling and Election; it is Beginning and End." (1

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<sup>1</sup> Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, London, Oxford University Press, 1933, 341-2

Niesel suggests that the terms are useful as a critical concept applied to the church in which we stand. This is permissible as long as it is applied strictly to the church and not used more widely in relation to Christian life as in the past. For then a false spirituality is spread which knows no physicality or "ensarkosis".

Again, the fact that the terms are used by Luther and Calvin in relation to their at-homeness in the Corpus Christianum suggest that care should be used if they are retained today. The serious attention they give to the problem of real and nominal membership no longer seems justified today in the same way, when "Christendom" seems to have lost much of its identity. There was a forensic quality in the conception of the church's invisibility which did not allow the church to be thought of as human and Divine, analogous to her master as the human and Divine union in his own person. The Word was rightly brought to a position of centrality, but tended to be narrowed to the Word and sacraments, and to the communio sanctorum. Luther in 1539 sought to broaden this to include seven signs of the authenticity of the church. This was not a return to traditional Catholicism so much as an attempt to introduce the fullness of the New Testament doctrine. The most serious deficiency in the visible-invisible church schema is thus its tendency to impoverish the fully human character of the church.

This lends force to the criticisms of docetism,<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Green, The Church of Christ, her Mission, Sacraments, and Discipline, London, Methuen & Co, 1902, 37

and of a discarnate tendency <sup>1</sup> in which the church is forced back to the stage of John the Baptist, pointing always forward to Christ. Luther's spiritualised communio sanctorum and Calvin's Christ-community may be partly open to this criticism, for both had to resist the argument that there was no binding obligation to be identified with the visible church.

In the widest sense of the word, the conception of the church's invisibility had the most revolutionary effect on ecclesiology. Taking the formula one holy, catholic, and apostolic church, we may summarise the effect as follows: the visible unity reposing in the unique person of the Pope was altered to the invisible unity in the Risen Christ. This heightened the conception of unity to one transcending space and time structures, and even a visible unity embracing all Christians in the world. It made possible the immediate inclusion of non-Papal Christians and it set up a tension which could be resolved only by the inauguration of full unity by the Parousia. The temptation was created to rest in an abstract Platonic view of the church's universal unity in Christ, but if Christ was taken seriously as the giver of unity and principle of unity, then the church had to strive to realise visible unity as part of Christ's Gospel that all may believe (Jn.17). This imperative was reflected in the impulse toward closer community

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<sup>1</sup> Congar, Divided Christendom, London, Bles, 1939, 91

in the Protestant Reformers.

The wholeness of the church was transferred from that inhering in the visible order and class of the priesthood to that of the invisible community of elect justified and sanctified believers in the Risen Christ, the communion of saints. This restored sanctity to one dominically conferred, and freed it from the limitation and perversion of human self-sanctification. It also restored its universality among the membership of the church, and in the totality of the common life of mankind.

Similarly with catholicity, the invisibility of the church meant its liberation from the wholeness of a visible juridical institution to the Wholeness of the invisible Body of Christ; thus creating a tension between the latter and all forms within history such that they become relative and temporary. The wholeness of Christ was allowed to burst the historical forms, and every attempt to confine Christ's Body to one structure was thrown into question.

Finally, the apostolicity that had been conveyed through a visible historical succession and tradition was reinterpreted by the invisibility of the church as being conferred vertically and dominically in the Word and Spirit of the Lord of history. This made impossible ultimately, all identification of the Word of God with its apprehension in any single human tradition. And it placed alongside this tradition and its institutional embodiment the witness of Scripture to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Luther and Calvin did not completely free themselves from the power

this human tradition, and the conviction that one confession and form must constitute the true church. The conflicts of the time did not permit any relaxation towards a more complete appreciation of the implications of their own positions.

Thus, from a unity residing in the Pope, wielding authority through a hierarchical priesthood as the visible expression of sanctity, over an institution which claimed a visible catholicity; and which determined the content of the apostolic tradition, Luther and Calvin, by the notion of the church's invisibility, substituted the conception of the invisible Body of Christ in and over the visible community of believers, by which unity was held in tension with the movement towards sanctity; wholeness in tension with the apostolic truth of the Word.

The church in this way was subordinated once more to Christ. This did not mean that a full ecclesiology had emerged. The fissiparous tendencies of Protestantism showed all too clearly how inadequate it was. However, a dynamic ecclesiology was henceforth in being by which the church's forms have must ever be renewed by the Gospel in order that the latter may shine more brightly through the sinful disordered appearance that the church presents.



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## APPENDIX A

The history of the conception of the church's invisibility and visibility after Luther and Calvin is outside the scope of this work. But three formulations may be given to show the trend in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The first is the answer made by John Knox in 1572 <sup>1</sup> to a charge by a Jesuit that he had formed "an invisible church" in Scotland. On the other hand, Knox denied that the Church of Scotland was invisible, "seeing the ground and the persons inhabitant within the same, ar subject to the senses of all those who list to look upon them".<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the doctrine of the church was openly taught, and the administration of the sacraments so "publict" that anyone could view them. Hence, said Knox,

"We fear not to affirme that the trew Kirk of Jesus Christ is as visible, yea, and as beutifull in all her proper ornamentes this day, within the Realme of Scotland, as ever she was in Corinthus, Galacia, Philipi (yea, or yet in Rome it self), what time that any of the Apostles rewled them, or that when they wer saluted be the Apostle in the Epistles for Kirkis." (3)

And yet on the other hand he rejected the visibility of the Roman Church with its "visible succession". For this changed credo sanctam ecclesiam into video sanctam ecclesiam.

"We, in the contrare", he said, "acknowledge and reverence the spous of Christ Jesus, sometimes exyled from the world, receaving sometymes the wynges of an egle that she may fle to the wylderness whereof God, not of man, she hath her place prepared." (4)

The universal church militant is "afflicted" and "obscured" by the Synagogue of Satan which usurps its title. Hence it can be discerned only in faith. It must be believed in. It

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<sup>1</sup> "An answer to a letter of a Jesuit named Tyrie" (1572), in The Works of John Knox, ed David Lang, Edinburgh, Thomas George Stevenson, (1864)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 494

<sup>3</sup> Idem

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 502

cannot be "seen". It is "invisible". With Knox the distinction is clear and living. The church is seen as a whole, its visibility is the visibility of place and persons, its invisibility is that of the object of faith: That the afflicted and obscured society of believers in Christ is yet the Body and Bride of Christ.

Twelve years before in the Scottish Confession, Knox laid down a much more dogmatic, even, perhaps, doctrinaire statement of the invisible church:

"... from the beginning there hes bene, and now is, and to the end of the warld sall be, ane kirk, that is to say, ane company and multitude of men chosen of God, who richtly worship and imbrace him be trew faith in Christ Jesus. ... This Kirk is invisible, knawen onelie to God, quha alane knawis whome he has chosen; and comprehends as weill (as said is) the Elect that be departed, commonlie called the Kirk Triumphant, and they that zit live and fecht against sinne and Sathan as sall live hereafter." (1)

Johann Gerhard, the Lutheran orthodox theologian, writing a generation later,<sup>2</sup> shows a later stage in the crystallization of the distinction, reached in the polemic against Rome. Eck and Bellarmine had accused Luther of founding a speculative church, upon Platonic ideas (ecclesia mathematica, ideae Platonicae), of creating two churches, and of weakening the compulsion of men to join the church in order to be saved. Gerhard denied all this. There were not two churches but one church, both (respectu diverso), visible and invisible. It was not a question of Anabaptist ecclesiolae, of the Enthusiasts raptus internus, of nominal or allegorical visibility and invisibility, but of a real invisible church, the bearer of the Gospel, existing also under Rome.

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<sup>1</sup> Schaff, The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1879, 458-9

<sup>2</sup> Joannis Gerhardus (1582-1637), Loci Theologici, Berlin, Schlawitz, 1866, Locus 22, cap 7, vol 3

He distinguished the church visible and invisible in various ways: First, it corresponds to the church of the called, and of the elect (ecclesia respectu vocatorum and respectu electorum). It was the church as an external society (externa societas) of confession, sacraments and discipline, and an internal society of faith, hope and love, whose members (absconditi, occulti homines) remain hidden. The visible and invisible church are also served by different means and instruments: External ones such as preaching and the sacraments, and internal ones, such as faith and the gift of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. There is however no separation between the two, for the invisible church is contained under the visible one (invisibilis electorum coetus continetur sub visibili congregatione vocatorum).<sup>1</sup> Gerhard does not indicate the relation any more closely but this arrangement of the two as concentric circles was maintained over against Calvinism.

The church of the elect is spoken of as being hidden also because its members appear simply as other men, (as homines corporei). It is invisible further, because it is not constituted as a secular Republic, such as Rome, with visible pomp and glory. Salvation in the real church does not come by outward conformity, but by interior regeneration and conjunction with Christ's mystical body (corpus mysticum).

He then enlarged on the nature of the invisible church as poor, contemptuous and small (miser, contemptus et exiguus) beset by infirmity and heresy. It is also "formally" invisible as the object of faith, but materially visible (Ecclesia respectu sui materialis videri potest, sed quatenus est formale fidei objectum non videtur, sed creditur).<sup>2</sup> As such its splendour is interior and hidden (absconditus). The invisible church, the remnant known only to God, is the Bride of Christ, it is those who constitute the flock (oves) who hear and follow Christ. It is the Body of Christ (corpus Christi).

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 308 b

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 313 a

The head is invisible, therefore the body is too because body and head are one person (una persona) and he who sees not the head, sees not the body also. Similarly the church militant and triumphant is invisible. It is obvious that the church triumphant is invisible. But so is the church militant. For the church is militant on account of the warfare which it wages. But the warfare is spiritual and invisible, as are the enemies, arms and the combat, ("Sed haec militia est spiritualis et invisibilis, hostes sunt invisibiles, arma sunt invisibilia, agonotheta est invisibilis").<sup>1</sup> Hence the church militant is invisible and so is the whole Catholic Church, since what is appropriate to the part, also ought to be attributed to the whole; (quod enim parti convenit, toti etiam propter illam partem tribui debet).<sup>2</sup>

Gerhard shows a fondness for distinctions and logical niceties, as e.g. in describing the church as formally invisible and materially visible. When he says that the Head and Body are one person and that if the head is invisible, the Body is so also, he tends toward abstraction, oversimplification, and an ~~the~~ unreal separation of the Body from the concrete believing community. The argument that the church militant is invisible on account of its invisible warfare, again, tends toward mere logic. But the most serious weakness in Gerhard's position is the introduction of a static view of the church's visibility and invisibility. He envisages in concentric circles an inner elect community of the Spirit, and an outer visible community of the sacraments. There seems little relation between the two except a common location.

By the time of the writing of the Westminster Confession, the distinction<sup>was</sup> thoroughly static, though carefully drawn. Both the invisible Catholic or universal Church, and the catholic or universal visible Church have their reality in Christ: the former comprises the elect:

<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 314 b

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 316 b



"The Catholic or universal Church, which is invisible consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the Spouse, the body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (1)

The latter comprises those confessing "the true religion". It is the Kingdom of Christ, and outside of it there is the "ordinary" possibility of salvation:

"The visible Church, which is also Catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined in one nation, as before under the law) consists of all those, throughout the world, that profess the true religion, and of their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the House and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation." (2)

Further it is added that "This Catholic visible Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible".<sup>3</sup>

Less than with Calvin is the doctrine of election controlled by the Christ-community. Perhaps an attempt to counteract this is seen by the placing of the Kingdom of Christ under the visible church, and its omission from the invisible Church. Nor is it an advance from the Reformers to make the sole characteristic of the visible church the profession of the true religion, and to abandon the formula of Word and Sacraments. The former tends towards a narrowing of the boundary to agreement in doctrine. The sole scope for any universality is in the invisible church, and this, grounded in secret election, is removed from playing any dynamic active role as the Body and Kingdom of Christ, Christ present in the world as he is made known and believed in. The Lutheran orthodox such as Gerhard, would permit election to operate only within the sphere of Word and sacraments. Whatever its narrowness, it provided a unity between visibility and invisibility. But both statements had become static, and doctrinal; a yoke to be lifted off by the Aufklärung, who preferred universality on a humano-centric basis, to a scholasticism parading as revealed truth.

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, op cit, 657

<sup>2</sup> Idem

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 658



## APPENDIX B

By the mid-nineteenth century, the distinction between the invisibility and the visibility of the church, and the conception of the church's reality as invisible as stated by Luther and Calvin had become heavily overlaid with misinterpretations. Albrecht Ritschl undertook in 1859<sup>1</sup> to make clear the Reformers' own views. His method was analytical and historical. He sought to analyse each into its dogmatic, ethical and the political-juristic characteristics; and to consider it in relation to those of Rome and the Anabaptists. He discovered a unity in Luther's conception of the church as the communion of saints, such that its visibility and invisibility referred only to different ways of considering the church. On the other hand he found irreconcilable contradictions in Calvin's view. The latter he concluded, were the source of that distinction between the visible and invisible church which had insinuated itself into the Lutheran tradition, and even into the current polemics of Lutheran apologists.

It was Luther's achievement, said Ritschl, to set the idea of the church on a specifically "dogmatic" basis: the communion of real believers. In itself, his was no "invisible" church, since to faith the communion of saints is thoroughly visible in Word and sacraments: in the institution, but not in the persons individually.

Nevertheless, viewed differently as a politico-juristic institution, the communion of saints is invisible and hidden. Hence in relation to its political-juristic basis of the Roman Church, it is invisible. For the church if constituted in these terms is a natural community comparable with any other earthly institution (as indeed Alvelde had argued).

It was also invisible against the Anabaptist idea of the church. The Anabaptists held like Luther to a dogmatic view of the church as communion of saints. But they thought to make

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<sup>1</sup> See above p 144

this visible in a moral community. They tried to identify the dogmatic (the justified) with the ethical (the good), and thus to separate like the Donatists the wheat from the tares. Luther replied with the notion of the church's invisibility. The true church was "empirically" invisible. It was a dogmatic idea, of a different order from either the politico-juristic or the ethical aspects.

Positively, then, how were these aspects to be related? Luther's answer, said Ritschl, was as "soul" and "body". The church conceived dogmatically is grounded objectively on the Word and sacraments in the politico-juristic community, which also appears as a moral community of those being sanctified by worship and confession. But wheat and tares grow up together. The three components are thus distinct, yet necessarily related, the latter two being dependent on the first and deriving their validity from it.

Luther's dogmatic conception of the "invisible" church was firmly related to the historical church. Luther succeeded, argued Ritschl, where Hus and Zwingli failed. Hus's universitas predestinatorum was indeed being realised on earth, but only in an ethical community recognized according to subjective standards. Zwingli with the same dogmatic conception had put up alongside it another of the church as the community of those confessing the true faith. Not only did this give him now two churches (visible and invisible) as objects of faith, but he provided no bridge, as Hus had done however imperfectly, between the elect as a divine idea and the elect as a historical reality. Luther by allowing predestination to slip somewhat into the background completed the imperfect "dialectic" of Hus by making the communion of saints visible to faith by the objective signs of Gospel and sacrament in place of subjective ethical criteria.

[In later years Martin Rade,<sup>1</sup> while adopting Ritschl's analysis of the dogmatic, socio-ethical, and juridical components in the conception of the church, was less sure than Ritschl that Luther had adequately taken account of the middle component, the

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<sup>1</sup> See above p 21

socio-moral. He found, with some justification that there was a Sprung, or jump from the dogmatic conception of the communion of saints, to its institutional embodiment in the rechtliche Landeskirche. There was no Gemeinschaftskirche sufficiently to bind the two together.]

Calvin failed, said Ritschl, where Luther succeeded. Like Zwingli he tried to relate Hus's universitas predestinatorum to historical reality. This he attempted by setting alongside it the later ethical idea of Melancthon of the "visible church" of the vocati, with a duly constituted ministry.<sup>1</sup> The members of the visible church are recognised though a judgment of love, and the church is recognised by Luther's dogmatic conception that Word and sacrament indicate the presence of the true church. He thus had three conflicting elements within the dogmatic conception of the church: (1) the church of the predestined known to God alone, which was absolutely invisible; (2) a community under the aspect of confessional and moral standards (thus confusing ethical striving with justification); and (3) Luther's communion of saints visible only in the means of grace.

So then for Ritschl, Luther's conception of the church as invisible was only in relation to the church according to political or ethical characteristics. To faith it is visible. But to Calvin the church was invisible to faith because of the predestination idea, invisible to faith because visible under ethical characteristics,<sup>2</sup> and yet visible to faith in Word and sacrament. The church for faith is thus irreducibly visible and invisible.

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<sup>1</sup> "Das ministerium verbi bildet das rechtlich-politische Merkmal der Kirche", (Ritschl, op cit, 93)

<sup>2</sup> Paradoxically it is at this point of Calvin's serious "dogmatic" blunder, that Ritschl has a word of commendation. There has been, he said, too little appreciations of the insistence of Calvin and the later Melancthon on the moral community as a necessary means in defining the aims of the communion of saints. (Op cit, 92)

Ritschl's analysis has been influential, though it has gone, in the main, unacknowledged. Its weakness lies in the fact that the ethical component is the only dynamic and moving one, while the dogmatic component is static. But for Luther as well as for Calvin, the dogmatic conception of the church was precisely the dynamic one. Moreover it was thoroughly eschatological in character. It was the communion of saints, realised in Christ, and not yet openly fulfilled, rather than an idea being progressively realised in ethical terms. The double character of this communion of saints has to be recognised. It is at once the old and the new creation. The new in the form of the cross. Ritschl tended to take the life out of the dogmatic conception in order to maintain its purity.

This "doubleness" in Calvin's idea of the church was its virtue for Alfred Krauss<sup>1</sup> who saw in the idea of the invisible church the cutting loose of the "ideal" from its imperfect historical realization. Such a separation Krauss believed to be the basis of any reform of the church. Hus had attempted this in his universitas predestinatorum but had got sidetracked into considering who constituted the invisible church, not what its nature was in relation to the church as an earthly community. Hence, as Ritschl had shown, his relating of the ideal and the historical was defective.

Krauss radically differed from Ritschl's understanding of Luther's view of the church. He found in Luther contradictions as serious as Ritschl found in Calvin. Luther, he said, took up Hus's idea but developed it from a different angle. For Hus the earthly concealed the spiritual, for Luther with a strong historical sense it revealed the spiritual. Hence he thought of the universitas predestinatorum as a historical community with an inner and an outer aspect (soul and body). Instead of two different concepts with the same name, it was the same thing under different aspects. Hence Word and Sacrament were characteristics of the inner side not simply of the

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<sup>1</sup> Das protestantische Dogma von der unsichtbaren Kirche, Gotha, Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1876



outer side. In this stress on the historical, Krauss saw a reversion to early catholicism, especially in view of Luther's later extension of the marks of the church to seven: Word, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Keys, the Service, Prayer, and the Cross.

At the same time, however, Luther was above all a reformer. This meant not only that, as Ritschl had shown, Luther substituted a dogmatic conception of the church for the prevailing politico-juristic one, but that he necessarily found himself talking of the church - as Hus had done, and as Zwingli was doing - in terms of the ideal which stands over against the actual manifestation. Luther spoke thus of the church as the invisible spiritual Kingdom of Christ existing throughout the whole world.

Here said Krauss, we have a contradiction between the old catholic view and that of the "Reformer"; between the historical institution as object of faith and the invisible ideal as object of faith. Luther struggled in vain to free himself from the impasse. What he did not recognize was that he was trying to put together two quite different things: the Kingdom of God, the only ground of salvation and object of faith; and the visibly organized community of the church, the earthly means for the realization of the Kingdom, but never the object of faith.<sup>1</sup>

For Ritschl the church properly speaking only existed as object of faith, for Krauss it was never so.

For this reason Krauss found Calvin's conception of the invisible church superior to Luther's. Calvin at least recognized that he was dealing with two different entities even though he never went to the length of giving them different names. And yet he was careful not to make Hus's mistake of having merely the ideal without any proper, related, historical community for its realization. Nor did he make Zwingli's mistake of turning from an earlier and satisfactory conception of

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<sup>1</sup> The word "church" ought therefore to be omitted from the Apostles' Creed or replaced by the term "Kingdom of God"



the visible church as local "Kilchhören" to a more defective one as object of faith based on outward standards. Calvin's concept of the invisible church corresponded to the ideal Kingdom of God as sole object of faith. The visible church was the realization of this ideal. And it was closely related to it by the idea that in some part (aliquatenus) the visible church was to be regarded as object of faith also. Now, said Krauss, Ritschl misunderstood this aliquatenus as turning the visible church (the church considered as an ethical community) into an object of faith. What Calvin actually meant was that as its ordinary means of realization the visible church always has the invisible ideal present within it. Hence Calvin can say that Word and Sacrament are never without results. Here he may be overstressing visibility, but, said Krauss, his error was smaller and more inconsequential than Luther's.

Thus for Krauss the conception of the invisible church was a partial liberation of the idea of the Kingdom of God from its Augustinian bondage to the visible church. And of the two reformers, Calvin came closest to succeeding in disentangling the invisible church-Kingdom of God from the Roman idea of the church while leaving it form<sup>al</sup>ly related to the visible church. However, the attempt to identify Calvin's invisible church with the Kingdom of God, and to reduce the visible church to a mere earthly institution, cannot be maintained as a fair interpretation of Calvin's thought.

Reinhold Seeberg, in a work published the following decade correctly rejected the spiritualising, "speculative" interpretation of Krauss.<sup>1</sup> He defended the Lutheran confessional presupposition that the means of grace are the only media salutis given by God, the only meeting point of the Divine and the human within the saving community of the church. It provided a unified but innerly differentiated conception of the church that accounted for the basic problem that human action does not correspond to God's will within the saving community. And he found this confirmed by a detailed historical

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<sup>1</sup> See above p 35

enquiry into conceptions of the church from the Shepherd of Hermas onwards. His treatment of Luther as the man who by a bold innovation first set the means of grace in the central position was broadly similar to Ritschl's except that he found a greater emphasis on the fact that the invisible Christenheit has external signs that make it definitely a historical community in continuity with the catholic church.

He also found that Luther conceived of the church as invisible not so much because of his polemical position over against Rome and Anabaptism but because the church is to be considered as an object of faith in terms of Hebrews 11,1. The church was invisible, even though the means of its existence put it in the sphere of visibility. So then as Krauss had recognized Luther considered the same community under different aspects. The existing church was an invisible reality; and the invisible church exists only where the historical church acts visibly and audibly.

This was not the case, Seeberg found, with Calvin's view. He was able to add little to what Ritschl had stated. There was the same discovery of a threefold conception of the true church: as the completely invisible body of the predestined (where no one knows whether he will persevere), the empirical, pietistic society of the righteous (bound together in faith, hope, and love), and the practical church of Word and Sacrament, as the necessary school of faith. And there was the same conclusion that Calvin never sets the means of grace in a necessary relation to anything but the visible church. Let Calvin emphasise the means of grace, and the church as the mother of all Christians as much as he likes he can never avoid depreciating the church as the saving community. He comes out finally with an invisible church as the totality of the elect saved by God throughout the world, and a visible church as a natural human community.

Gottschick, the following year (1886), in a more specialised and careful work that has not been superseded,<sup>1</sup> showed that Luther was not dependent on Hus in the decisive formulation of his conception of the church. Gottschick began his study of Luther only at 1518, but this was sufficient to show that before Luther read Hus's de Ecclesia, he had already formed his conception of the church. Gottschick found this conception to be highly unified, not innerly differentiated, as R. Seeberg had argued. Luther drew on the mediaeval notion of the communis fidelium within the external church, and adopted the idea of the communio sanctorum from Augustine, but developed his own view of the invisible church based on his recognition of the priority of Salvation over all earthly standards. This community of believers had its ground in the word of the Gospel and the sacraments. He did not concern himself with pushing back the idea to the predestinating will of God. Gottschick found the clearest expression of Luther's view not in his earlier writings, but after 1530 when Luther spoke simply of the Church of faith, invisible before the world, with the visible signs. In the earlier years, there had been suggestions of a conception involving concentric circles of visibility and invisibility but later the church was one; being totally separated from the non-church (unbelievers, Papacy, hypocrites) who were in the church, perhaps, but not of it.

In Rudolf Sohm<sup>2</sup> there appeared - also from the Lutheran side - an influential interpretation of the Reformers' conception of the invisible church which bore a certain resemblance to the spiritualistic one put forward earlier by Krauss. Sohm, interested primarily in ecclesiastical law, found in the Lutheran conception the complete separation of the church proper from any entanglement in what Ritschl had

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<sup>1</sup> See above p 14

<sup>2</sup> Kirchenrecht I: Die geschichtlichen Grundlagen, Leipzig, Duncker & Humbolt, 1892

called the politico-juristic community, and what Sohm called church- or canon law (Kirchenrecht). His celebrated thesis was: "Das Kirchenrecht steht mit dem Wesen der Kirche in Widerspruch".<sup>1</sup> For mediaeval catholicism, the church and the Kingdom of God were inconceivable apart from a definite legal form and order. But Luther came to see a basic conflict between the two, which was dramatically shown by his burning of the Corpus Juris Canonici in 1520. He had discovered anew, said Sohm, the early christian and evangelical conception of the church: The church was spiritual (geistlich), the constitution (Recht) was of the world (weltlich).

Luther's church was not something purely invisible. But the necessary becoming visible of the church did not mean that it included any legal form of constitution. The Lordship of the church was exercised by Christ only through the preaching of the Word and through the Sacrament, and thus the church becomes visible. To be sure Luther allowed for the existence of human order and powers, but only as subject to the Word and judgment of God, and only to be borne as a cross.

Luther, according to Sohm, recovered the early church's sense of freedom from the past and from inherited human historical ties and obligations. He asserted the church's right of reformation under the sole headship of Christ. Hence the irreconcilable opposition between the visible-invisible people of God, whose only power is the power of the Keys, and constitutional forms. From the point of view of church polity, as Ritschl had affirmed, the church is wholly invisible.

The fact that Luther assigned to the temporal power so dominant a role was explained by Sohm as Luther's retention of the mediaeval conception of church and "state" as two forces within the one Christian commonwealth (corpus Christianum).

It was the mistake of Calvin (and Zwingli) said Sohm, to revert to the catholic identification of the church with its legal constitution. This explains, he pointed out, why

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<sup>1</sup> op cit, 1



Krauss and others were anxious to separate the Kingdom of God from the church. Krauss correctly saw that Luther rejected the identification of the Kingdom of God with the catholic form of the church. But what he did not realize was that for Luther the church had no Weltform as such. It exists wherever people are grouped around the Word. And where these people of God are, there is the Kingdom of God. Any necessity to distinguish between the church and the Kingdom of God does not arise.

For Calvin, however, Christ had instituted definite offices and authority over the church. The church became, therefore, a self-ruling, legal personality, capable of resisting the State, if necessary. When discipline was added as a sign of the true church, then the church's constitution became as in the Roman Church a matter of faith. Then the invisible church was inevitably placed in fetters.

Luther's conception of the church as Sohm understood it, would tend to give the church an independence from all constitutional forms likely to impede the free operation of the Word from within the church. But it would also expose the church very decidedly to the controlling power of an alien authority, in particular the State. The complete rejection of the formal element also tends to dissolve the conception of the invisible church into something approaching a pure unhistorical idea. This we may question as truly reflecting the thought of Luther. For him, the church was visible only to faith - yes. But, as Schlink points out, faith also recognises the external signs of the true church as signs of its visibility in the historical form of the church.<sup>1</sup>

The church's nature as created by the Word of the incarnate Christ means that nature and form are inseparable - though the latter before the world is cruciform. It is true that all Luther wanted was the preaching of the Word. Sohm

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<sup>1</sup> Schlink, Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften, München, Chr Kaiser, 1947, 2 ed, 296, n 24



concluded that therefore Luther had no constitutional law or authority in mind, no Zwangsrecht. But there is a Biblical law or Recht as well as the juristic which Luther had no time for. Luther demanded freedom for the latter so that the former should have a free way. Kattenbusch calls this the double stratum in the conception of right or law (Doppelschichtigkeit in the Rechtsbegriff). Sohm, he said, overlooks the corresponding Doppelschichtigkeit in the idea of the church, and dismisses the ordered congregation (Kultgemeinde) as Recht and Welt. Luther's Evangelical congregations could fairly be described as legal organisations.<sup>1</sup>

The length to which Sohm can go in pressing the invisibility of the church is shown in a passage from volume two of his Kirchenrecht:<sup>2</sup>

"Die Kirche Christi ist unsichtbar. Darum gibt es keine sichtbare Gemeinschaft, welche als solche die Kirche Christi wäre. Auch sofern sie Wort und Sakrament besitzt und verwaltet, ist die sichtbare, "leibliche" Christenheit nicht Kirche Christi. Sie besitzt Wort und Sakrament nur äusserlich, scheinbar. Gerade sofern es wahres Gotteswort ist, ... gehört es nicht der sichtbaren, sondern der ... unsichtbaren Christenheit. ... Es gibt keine sichtbare Kirche."

Karl Rieker, the following year (1893), continued the line begun by Sohm.<sup>3</sup> He rejected the traditional interpretation that the Reformers' conception was intended to issue in an independent, self-sufficient form, over against the State. The church, he held, was according to Luther invisible as the object of faith. It did not coincide with any external order, but was grounded instead on the universal unity of Western Christendom. The Reformers did not want to establish a new form, but to reform mediaeval Christendom. For Luther, the only church was the invisible Christenheit. This was never thought of as a free company of believers, but as an institution,

<sup>1</sup> Kattenbusch, op cit, 291-6

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Schlink, op cit, 301, n 29

<sup>3</sup> In Die rechtliche Stellung der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands, Leipzig, CL Hirschfeld, 1893

a Regiment, over against the weltliches Regiment. It was the mediaeval doctrine of the two swords, the Gelasian theory. The old form of the church was destroyed: that of the Christian State supplanted it. The Reformers' view, concluded Rieker, led directly to the Landeskirche.

In a later work,<sup>1</sup> Rieker referred also to the reformed conception of the church. Accepting Sohm's sharp cleavage between the invisible church and the organised visible institution (which was "ein Stück Welt"), Rieker asserted that for Luther the invisible communion of saints had no closer relation to the organised Gemeinde than to other worldly Societies. "Was daran Kirche ist, das ist nicht sichtbar, und was daran sichtbar ist, das ist nicht Kirche."<sup>2</sup> The position of Calvin, on the contrary, was that the invisible church is more closely related to the äusserliche Gemeinde than to any other community - when rightly constituted. This meant that the latter is not a mere instrument for proclaiming the Gospel, or for educating the people in the faith; it is not only a gottesdienstliche Gemeinschaft, but ein sozialer Organismus for Christian life and activity, independent in its structure.

Sohm (and Rieker) while laying down a particular interpretation of Luther's view of the church, did not expound the notion of the invisibility of the church at length. This however was the task Ernest Rietschel set himself some years later (in 1900).<sup>3</sup>

For Luther, declared Rietschel, the dimensions of the visible church exactly coincide with those of the invisible communion of saints. There is only one magnitude. Everything else, the organised forms of the church and the nominal group of adherents are the Not-church or simply to use Sohm's word, Welt. This means that Luther had no thought of any "inner differentiation" (ecclesia proprie et late dictu) such as Seeberg

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<sup>1</sup> Grundsätze reformierter Kirchenverfassung, 1899

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 60-1

<sup>3</sup> "Luthers Anschauung von der Unsichtbarkeit und Sichtbarkeit der Kirche", see above p 35

thought he found. Seeberg was drawn into the implicit recognition of the church as two concentric circles of real and apparent believers through not considering the members of the church as the exclusive objects of the means of grace. This however was what Luther had done. And this explains why he would never give any external form of the church the title "church". For the line of the church passed simply and clearly between the wheat and the tares.

Then was the church to Luther an invisible, unknowable magnitude? Against Seeberg's attempt to distinguish between the "nature" and the "appearance" of the church, Rietschel argued that Luther virtually never used the term "visible" church, and debarred every organised community from the name "church". But the church was none the less plainly visible. It was visible because it proclaimed its faith in the open. Luther's invisible church was not different from Melancthon's ecclesia visibilis. But chiefly the invisible church was visible as the object of faith. Here Rietschel distinguished between an object of faith as a logical conclusion from premises held to be true, and an object of faith as also the object of experience. Luther, said Rietschel, did not, as his interpreters had sometimes claimed, hold to the first sense. It was not - ~~E~~ternal signs exist for the true church: God's Word is never without fruit (Is 55<sup>11</sup>): therefore there are believers about even if they are not recognizable. It was rather that he experienced the church as a living power. He knew and felt himself united with other believers in his neighbourhood. And this came about because by the confession of faith in the mouth of the other believer each was brought into the communion of saints.

How then were invisibility and visibility to be related? They were related to Luther, said Rietschel, not in the object (the church itself) but "in der Art des Sehens". Rietschl understood Luther to mean that the invisible church is only polemically invisible. He read dogmatic visibility for Luther's invisibility. This said Rietschel was not being faithful to the exactness of Luther's thought. Luther never looked at <sup>the</sup> church

with a neutral "scientific eye". He never, like Ritschl, considered the church as it would appear to non-Christians, but always as a believer. Hence, for Luther visibility was reserved for sensory visibility. Invisibility despite its negative form yet contained throughout a positive significance. It was sola fide perceptibilis.

Sensory visibility and fideist invisibility were to be understood, according to Rietschel, in terms of form and content, body and soul. The external human form of the Word is apprehended through sensory perception; the inner divine content is received through faith. The two (sinnliche Wahrnehmung und Glaubenserkenntnis) are inseparable. Applied to the church, therefore, invisibilis means the church according to its inner nature, humanly inaccessible, positively recognised only by faith. Visibility is the recognition of the invisible church according to its sensorily apprehendable form. Hence, "niemand sieht wer heilig und gläubig ist" applies to unbelievers. For the believer, the church is invisible (content)/visible (form); for the unbeliever it is invisible (content)/invisible (form); since he cannot distinguish the signs of the true church from the non-church, the Reich Christi from the Weltreich.

The church for Luther, concluded Rietschel, is visible for and experienced by the faithful and only them. Unbelievers pass it by unseeing.<sup>1</sup> The area included by the terms invisible and visible is one and the same. The church is simply wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ. It is with the Word apart from all external forms of organisation.

In 1932, Rietschel returned to the subject in a work of greater length<sup>2</sup>, but with an unchanged viewpoint. He championed the cause of the by now "out-of-date" visible-invisible church schema, arguing that the problem of the relation between the facto which the terms represent was still a real one. To

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<sup>1</sup> They are likened to animals who are exposed to music, hear the notes, but lack a musical sense. And the church is made analogous to real poetry which has its own objective criteria, and yet cannot be confined to special areas (op cit, 451-2)

<sup>2</sup> See above p 18



Rietschel, Luther alone had showed the way to the solution. The church, for Luther was the communion of saints (Gemeinde der Gläubigen), communion (Gemeinde) because a Christ-community, not a human community (Gemeinschaft), or an abstract Christianity (Christenheit). It was neither an institution that could exist without persons, nor simply a society (Gesellschaft). It was a communion (Gemeinde) that included an objectively-founded community (Gemeinschaft). It was the Kingdom and Body of Christ, the priesthood of believers in which all shared. If this close communion (Gemeinde) idea faded out for Luther in later years, it was due, said Rietschel, to Luther's spiritual loneliness as leader of the evangelical movement.

The invisibility<sup>1</sup> of the communio Sanctorum applied to the natural man. It was perceptible to the believer, because the church was the bearer of the visible means of grace. These also, however, were in essentials invisible to the natural man, and perceptible only to faith. Rietschel then re-emphasised that the perceptibility of the church to the believer included an element of real experience, through the visible signs, and not immediately or mystically. How was the church visible to believers, and to what extent? Rietschel answered that for Luther the church had only a limited visibility in the sense that it is impossible to define its bounds, but at the same time the believer always perceives the church as a whole in what he is able to perceive of the church: ecclesiola in ecclesia; and ecclesia in ecclesiola! The church is experienced in the confession of faith of the others, Christ alone knowing with absolute certainty who are his. Without this experience, no Christian community was possible.

Luther's view of the church, concluded Rietschel, saw from inside-out; not descriptively from outside-in (which would give rise to a concentric circles theory). The believer sees the visible Word first, apprehends its invisible content, Christ; from there grasps the invisible reality of the church,

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<sup>1</sup> The word "invisible" Rietschel found in Luther's writings approximately 30 times, evenly distributed.



and thereby is enabled to perceive the visible form or larva of the church. This process is the condescendence of God's revelation of the invisible-visible church, through the visible-invisible Word and sacraments.

In 1907, Walther Köhler,<sup>1</sup> took up the question of the relation of the visibility to the invisibility of the church in Luther. He took issue with Sohm and Rieker, and based his position principally on Luther's treatise against Alveld of 1520, and the Deutsche Messe of 1526. Luther's conception of the church, he agreed, was a fideist one, the church was invisible before the world but visible for faith. It was indeed not related to the external ordered community, but it had a definite community character. It materialised itself, it was church-building. Luther's conception passed directly to Bucer and through him to Calvin, where it was put into effect. The Landeskirche, on the other hand was a product of necessity.

Drews,<sup>2</sup> the next year, developed Köhler's position. Luther hoped, said Drews, that the reform of Christenheit would be undertaken by Christian rulers. This optimistic hope was not fulfilled, so he turned from the nobility, such as Sickingen, to the individual Gemeinden, such as were being set up in the cities. The church was to be built up from below. However, his own congregation of Wittenberg doomed this ideal also. For the church did not build itself up from below; and he was against Lambert's attempt to impose a Gemeinde form from above. Luther's ideal was that of an outward form corresponding to an invisible-visible communio sanctorum such as Rietschel and Köhler had found. The Volkskirche, he concluded, came about under the pressure of circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup> See above p 18

<sup>2</sup> Paul Drews, "Entsprach das Staatskirchentum dem Ideale Luthers?", in Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche: Ergänzungsheft, 1908

Hermelink in the same year,<sup>1</sup> sharply controverted the position of Köhler and Drews. He exposed the slender basis of this position and argued that Luther had no desire to materialise the invisible church. His object was rather a constant search for the right methods to Christianise people under the shadow of the Apocalypse. Both the serious Christians Luther longed for, and the general type of loose gathering were part of the external organization. The external form was never a great concern for Luther because with Antichrist enthroned, the end was near. (Hence externally omnia sunt indifferentia). Luther's conception of the church was made up of three components: the Occamistic principle of the church as willed by God; the communio sanctorum in the corpus simulatum, of Augustine; and the old Gelasian principle of the geistliche and weltliche Regiment within the one Christenheit. Hermelink denied in Luther the Gemeindeprinzip ideal and asserted that he accepted the hierarchial arrangement under the Obrigkeiten from his basic conception of the church.

One weakness of these controversial writings is not only that they were endeavouring to claim Luther in support of a particular party in ecclesiastical political theory, but that they made no attempt to study Luther's conception of the church historically and as a whole. This was the task Werdermann attempted to do for Calvin in 1909.<sup>2</sup> Much of the form of Calvin's conception of the church, Werderman found, was taken over from Rome, but the content was quite different. Here he followed Luther more closely than some have been willing to recognize. Both men placed over against Rome the conception of the church as an invisible spiritual community. Both used in this connection the phrase "the totality of the predestined". For both the invisible church is at the same time visible in so far as the Word is rightly preached and the sacraments administered. For both the church was only visible

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<sup>1</sup> See above p 65

<sup>2</sup> "Calvins Lehre von der Kirche", see above p 133

to faith (i.e. the mali were not of the church). In addition Calvin rescued elements of Luther's communio sanctorum which Melancthon jettisoned in favour of the church considered as a pedagogical institution (Schola and Amt). Werdermann also discerned the influence of Bucer, in the idea of the binding together of the elect into a community under the headship of Christ, and in the stress on discipline. But Calvin's view had its own individual colouring due to his inner spiritual experience. His conversion consisted in being freed from guilt (distance from God) through the God's grace in Christ. And this was accompanied by the experience that, in His majesty, God does not tolerate idolatry. It was a matter of obedience solely to the Bible, where God's truth is revealed. It was understandable, therefore, that Calvin felt bound to put the church closer to predestination, to stress the necessity of moral righteousness, and the authority of Scripture in ordering the church's life.

A development in Calvin's thought occurred, said Werdermann, between the time of the 1536 Institutes and the second stay in Geneva. In the Institutes of 1536 the bond between Christ and his community, an inner unity of faith, hope and love, was very strongly emphasised, and the idea of predestination had not yet permeated his conception of the church. The latter was considered according to its inner spiritual nature. There is thus no hint of any distinction between a visible and invisible church. In the Catechism of 1536-7 the line is similar, and during this first stay in Geneva Werdermann found no departure from this in Calvin's practice except that in his struggle to establish the external constitution of the church he not unnaturally emphasised the visible side.

In his polemical Answer to Sadolet of 1539, said Werdermann, Calvin emphasised as before the inner side of the church without desiring in any way to adopt a formal distinction between a visible and invisible church. The church is the mother of all Christians, and Calvin aimed only at restoring the church to its former true character. However in the Institutio of the same year Werdermann detected a certain shifting of emphasis. The teaching on election became more detached,

and became more important for the inner side of the church. And the emphasis on the visible side became stronger under the pressure of circumstances. The right and necessity of the visible church was now firmly maintained. The result was the emergence of a clear distinction between the invisible and visible church though without any impulse towards separating the two sides. During Calvin's stay in Germany this tendency became if anything more marked, until by 1543 the double character of the church was referred to as Scriptural, in the Institutes, and the ecclesia invisibilis was explicitly mentioned.

The latter remained as the basic principle while the visible side continued to be evolved largely, said Werdermann, in accordance with the practical demands of the situation. During the second stay in Geneva, he concluded, the movement in Calvin's thought came to an end. The importance now fell on the external church; but the basis remained the invisible church of the elect.<sup>1</sup> But both were bound together under the dominant interest of Calvin that God alone ruled in his church, and Christ alone was the head of the visible and invisible sides of the church.

The more balanced picture of Werdermann compared e.g. with that given by Seeberg, is paralleled by the amply documented essay of Holl on the formation of Luther's conception of the church.<sup>2</sup> Holl argued that Luther's view was in no sense to be regarded as simply a polemical development during his struggle with Rome in 1518-21. It arose rather as an integral part of his teaching on justification, as set forth in the Commentary on the Psalms in 1513-14. Justification was union with God and Christ and the opposite of all self-justification and moral perfectionism. It entered man through the Gospel, outwardly heard and inwardly appropriated. The

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<sup>1</sup> This tended to recede into the background, said Werdermann, except in Calvin's exegetical and homiletical work where it came in more strongly as the unio mystica of the elect with Christ (op cit, 330-4)

<sup>2</sup> See above p 7



proclamation of this Gospel was the task of the church. And the possession of the Gospel was its greatest treasure. Holl showed that this conception of the church was not that of the scholastic corpus Christi mysticum (as Grisar, the catholic historian, had argued); it was rather the more or less unconscious inversion of the order of the means of grace from Sacrament - Word to Word - Sacrament. This inversion arose directly from his teaching on justification.

From this point it was but a short step to the idea of the invisible church. The action of the Gospel was a double one. It separated men according to their acceptance or rejection of it. And thus it judged them. But the line of separation ran not between the world and the church but through the church itself. Hence arose a narrower circle within the external "church", the true church of Christ. The nature of this church was invisible. Luther called it usually "geistlich" or "unsichtlich". It was hidden, really present, visible to faith, even in its lowliness and humiliation, as the free, personal, community of Christ. It was not an institution, and had nothing to do with power and external authority. Here, said Holl, not in the 1519-20 period (Tsäckert), or in 1518-19 period (Gottschick) was the first expression of Luther's conception of the church's invisibility. Holl thus finally disposed of Ritschl's and Krauss's claim that Zwingli first used the term, the invisible church.

Augustine, argued Holl, had distinguished between the institutional, catholic church, and the true unknowable "church" of the elect. But Luther consciously departed from this by substituting for election the historically effective Word of God. The character of Augustine's church of the elect precluded any effective relation with the visible church institution. But Luther's view of justification by the preached Word of God, issued necessarily in the social form of the believing community. Holl discerned the influence of monasticism at this point, but the monastic brotherhood for Luther was not to be restricted to a small group aiming at individual piety. It was to be realised in the whole church.



At the time of the Psalms commentary, said Holl, Luther had no desire to draw apart from Rome. The true church necessarily existed in the corpus mixtum because the hierarchy were commissioned to be the bearers of the Gospel. The Gospel preached by them in a definite locale united the visible and invisible church. Hence the invisible church could not be separated or spiritualised away. In the Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, the criticisms of the hierarchy became sharper, but the prelate was still the mouth of Christ himself.

The Ninety five Theses showed Luther under greater pressure, still trying to hold on to his newly won position, and to the visible church represented by the Pope and bishops. It was only in the face of Papal excommunication, Holl found, that Luther turned to a separation of the visible and the invisible church. The true church was the spiritual assembly of those united with God not the visible authority. Hence a ban by the latter could only separate a person from the external church.

From this moment Luther elaborated the same position with increasing openness. But he went a step further, Holl pointed out, in proceeding on the basis of his notion of the invisible, spiritual church to re-evaluate the character of the visible church from which he was being threatened with excommunication. He began to see the Pope's authority in a different light. His pronouncements were not the sentence of God but those of a representative of the community of Christians. The Pope in no way displaced Christ in the lordship of the Kingdom within history. His was a human power, historically evolved under the providence of God, and not differing from that of other Obrigkeiten. (The true church was not bound to "persons").

But more positively, Luther began, according to Holl, to reconstruct the visible church idea anew on the basis of his view of justification and the invisible church, and the new understanding of the universal priesthood. At the Leipzig Disputation the unconditional authority of the Bible and the right of every Christian to prove his faith from its clear

words came to the surface. These led to the right of every Christian to be considered within the external ordering of the church as an equal.

On the question of the relation between the church's visibility and invisibility, Holl had written four years earlier.<sup>1</sup> He asserted then that Luther stressed the church both as a believing community entered by a personal, freely willed decision (Bekenntniskirche) and as the general Volkskirche (against Drews and W.Köhler). In addition, he stressed the gulf between the geistlichen and weltlichen Regimenten, where each had its own territory. He denied that Luther appropriated the mediaeval corpus Christianum idea (against Sohm). Luther's Christenheit, he argued, was founded on faith: he meant the church, not Christendom, when he used this term.

This was different from another mediating attempt, by Karl Müller,<sup>2</sup> the previous year. Müller accepted Sohm's and Rieker's view of the mediaeval origin of Luther's view of Christenheit. But, like Holl, he argued that Luther emphasised both the Volkskirche and the inner believing community. If anything he went further in supporting the validity of the landeskirchliche Regiment, while insisting that Luther limited the secular power's participation.

One of the longest considerations of Luther's idea of the church was that of Kattenbusch, published in 1928.<sup>3</sup> It included an extensive review of previous contributions to the subject. These, said Kattenbusch, agree that Luther's basic idea is that of the communio sanctorum. The latter includes an emphasis on the sancti as believers (fideles), and on their communio as the bond of union. But because Luther

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<sup>1</sup> "Luther und das Landesherrliche Kirchenregiment" (1911), in Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte: I. Luther, Tübingen, JCB Mohr, 1923

<sup>2</sup> "Kirche, Gemeinde und weltliche Obrigkeit nach Luther", in Die christliche Welt, 1910, nos 22 and 23

<sup>3</sup> See above p 15

did not distinguish "communion" (Communio) and congregation (congregatio), various differences of interpretation have arisen. The key to Luther's conception, Kattenbusch found, is the presence of a "double stratum" (Doppelschichtigkeit), in the communio sanctorum. The existence of this has been obscured by the undue attention given to the catchwords "visible" and "invisible", which were central for Ritschl and Rietschel, but not since then.

Kattenbusch then dealt with the visible-invisible schema. The church for Luther is a single idea (Individualbegriff), and indivisible (i.e. it is no Genusbegriff). It is the communio sanctorum of the Creed, the object of faith, and therefore invisible. For the sancti, the term invisibilis meant that their existence as sancti, may be doubted, and must be believed. For the relation of communio, however, invisibilis refers not to its existence, but to its nature as spiritual (geistlich), i.e. as united with the Spirit, not as a purely natural community (corporaliter).

He then went on to argue that the attributes "invisible" and "visible" were equally valuable for Luther and equally constitutive of the church, despite their being placed in opposition. The contrast was necessary partly to restore the right Biblical understanding of the church and to distinguish this from what passed under the name of "church". It was also to distinguish the church as a Divinely given fact (Gegebenheit), from the church as not yet realised (Aufgegebenheit), (roughly equivalent to Ritschl's dogmatic and ethical forces - Momente). The church is as invisible as everything in the world which receives its form from God, and yet it is also just as visible as an actual expression of God's action. The difference is roughly equivalent to the presence of the divine and the human in the church. The Divine/human - geistlich/körperlich - invisible/visible.

In relating the invisible and visible forces, Kattenbusch used an idea from Schelling that the Spirit is the "invisible" of nature, and that nature is the "visible" of Spirit. The community of faith is the invisible of the community of love, and that of love is the visible of that of faith.

Or, argued Kattenbusch, they could be related under the terms the church in the broad sense (ecclesia sensu generali), and in the narrow sense (ecclesia sensu speciali). These corresponded, for Luther, to the basic communio sanctorum, and the Catholic ecclesiastical structure (Kultgemeinde) in the narrow sense.

However, these two forces (Momente) are to be distinguished from the double stratum in the communio sanctorum, which Luther worked out somewhat later. This double stratum, or Doppelschichtigkeit, took its rise from the problem of relating the over-aggrandised Catholic ecclesiastical structure of Rome to the broad view of the church as communio sanctorum where there was a universal priesthood of all the sancti. The solution to the problem had its beginning in the work against Alveld in 1520. Here, by Hus's help, he learned the different senses in which the word Ecclesia is used, and how the church as the community of believers (Kultgemeinschaft) and the church as a gathering for worship (Kultgemeinde) were to be understood. The latter, Luther found, had become mixed up with much that was merely worldliness. What belonged to the world had to be returned to the world. And the purified form of the worshipping congregation (Kultgemeinde) that remained was to form one of three "concentric circles" (or "Hierarchies") where the communio sanctorum had its field of operation. The basic stratum, or Grundschrift, was the communio sanctorum, the corpus Christi mysticum, united in faith, hope and love with Christ, and having its existence in Him (an "Ewigkeitsgrösse"). But living in time and history, among those not members of the communio, the sancti work this out in the three realms of politics and society (Politia), the church (Ecclesia) and the family (Oeconomia). Each of these is a corpus mixtum of the baptised. They are three concentric communities of the Kingdom of God that is being realised on earth. In and behind these external forms, or means, is the end, or Gottes Zielgedanken, the communio sanctorum.



Kohlmeyer, in 1928,<sup>1</sup> sought to trace Luther's idea of the church in its broadest historical context. He set himself to enquire what the church meant for one who broke up the unity of the church as it then was, questioned its existing bases: Papacy, Conciliarism, the Clerical status, and Sacramentarianism; and substituted a conception of his own, where, said Kohlmeyer, the connection between individual justification and the community of the church is more practical than systematic.

There is something of the individualism of the mystic about Luther, said Kohlmeyer, especially when the nature of his background is recalled. For that background was the thoroughly corporate life of the mediaeval period. Then the church had coincided with the community as the whole area of religious conditioning. Even the mediaeval guilds were but small reflections of the universal corpus mysticum of the Church-Empire.

Luther, according to Kohlmeyer, did not react against this immediately. His commentary on the Psalms reflected in its allegorical exegesis the traditional piety of the mediaeval church. And it contained a view of the church drawn directly from the Augustinian-Scholastic tradition. Thus e.g. he refers to the corpus Christi verum et simulatum, and the communio sanctorum and ecclesia mixta. However during the next few years, asserted Kohlmeyer, we find Luther developing all his thought on the church within the one central conception of the corpus mysticum. The idea itself he had inherited from the late Scholastic, Biel. But this had been firmly set into the earthly organism of the ecclesia Romana by the central position of the Sacrament.

As Holl had pointed out Luther's innovation concerned the pivot about which everything connected with the name church turned. He replaced the Sacrament by the Word. The corpus Christi became the new creation of the Word that goes out from God. The Word is conceived in a new dynamic way as

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<sup>1</sup> See above p 9



the vehiculum of salvation independent of human psychological mediation. The Word became sacramentalised. It was the Sacrament spiritualised and with all the latter's dignity and efficacy. But the ex opere operato and exclusive centering of the action in worship were dropped. Thereby all human co-operation in salvation was excluded. Predestination was re-interpreted as God making the preached Word efficatia for congregation and individuals. And the seven traditional sacraments were drastically reduced and reconstituted.

In this conception of the corpus Christi created by the Word, Luther, said Kohlmeyer, made Christ the centre. He immanentised his earthly lordship and saw a more intra-worldly struggle between the Kingdom of Christ and the Ruler of the world. He also laid the foundation for his conception of the ecclesia invisibilis. Just as Christ is the Deus revelatus in the form of a servant, so the church also appears in the world sub contrario and therefore invisibilis. More fully than Ritschl and the other early interpreters of Luther, Kohlmeyer saw this aspect of the ecclesia invisibilis as the ecclesia abscondita. He traced the idea back to Biel's scholastic distinction of Christ ruling as homo in the church militant, and as God in the church triumphant. And he found it proof of Luther's widest possible separation from mystical immediacy.

Thus defined from God and not from men Luther described the church's structure as invisible, as a mundus intellectualis or intelligibilis. These were Platonic phrases, said Kohlmeyer, for a thoroughly realistic view of the church as the totality of God's redeeming activity. The notion of the church as invisible is thus inseparable from Luther's personally-found relation to God. But it is none the less a true community. Kohlmeyer found traces of the catholic conception of the intercession and revering of saints, with the difference that for Luther Christ becomes the sole source of the supranatural influxus by which the Christian is supported against Anfechtung and the saints are thought of in terms of the unknown faithful on earth.

The transition from this invisible church to its empirical form occurs in the mediation of the Word in acts of worship. Kohlmeyer found no necessity for this, only the highest practical way for men to come into the invisible church. Both visible and invisible are together but antinomous in the sense of Philippians 2<sup>12-13</sup>. Preaching and sacraments are the masks by which men can hold fast to God, and by which the free operation of the Word is incarnated in human decisions and responses. This human response is directly ethical. It consists of a radical self-offering, not unlike the annihilatio of mysticism, and also of the unconditional service of one's neighbour and the bearing of his burdens, as a consequence of the incarnation.

Hence the invisible church is realised in a visible community, or institution (larva), through acts of worship and ethical action. But there is no necessary relation between the two. The nature of the church is always invisible and spiritual. Not even the electi know they are elect. For the church is sola (!) fide perceptibilis. This rules out Rietschel's interpretation of an immediate experiential relation between the members of the invisible church. Luther, said Kohlmeyer, held later that this was to go behind the sole supranatural linking of each member to the Head. Luther also rejected the tendency to make the invisible church a mystical ecclesiola. The Christian lives simply in communion with God and in the visible congregation of Christians. The communion of saints is therefore not "visible" in Rietschel's nor even in the traditional sense.

Luther did not recognize any static ecclesia mixta, after 1520, according to Kohlmeyer, but he did emphasise the "church in the world", ecclesia in mundo, ecclesia involuta in carne. The unity of the conception is preserved by keeping in mind its dynamic, historical character. Kohlmeyer saw, unlike Rietschel, that for Luther even the real believers are sinners and in a sense therefore the invisible church is nothing more than an ecclesia mixta! (Äussere Gemeinschaft). Against Rade, Kohlmeyer argued that Luther did strive for moral community, but this was never more than the larva of the supra-ethical.

Kohlmeyer found an irreducible gap between Luther's idea of the church as an invisible reality built out from Christ, and the visible outward community. Paul Althaus<sup>1</sup> found this a misreading of Luther's conception of the church as communio sanctorum. For Althaus, Luther's conception of the church followed from that of God's revelation in the Cross. The Word is revealed in the Cross in hiddenness. The church as those won by the Word shares in this. Hence it is invisible, for its inner form runs contrary to all that is obvious in history. So far with Kohlmeyer. But Althaus like Holl went on to find a closer connection between justification and community. Justification comes because of the life of Christ among sinners and his death for them. The living among sinners and the bearing of their burdens then becomes the only example for all who hear the Word. Justification is the ground of love, the Cross forms the community of the church. Theologia Crucis issues in Kreuzesliebe. This means, however, that even our love of God is in indirectness, in "immanence", in the person of our neighbour. Thus are all bound together, leaders and led, good and bad, rich and poor. What one has is for the other. The form of the servant applies to all.<sup>2</sup>

Now, continued Althaus, the church, this real community, is not only invisible in the sense of being hidden in the form of a servant, it is absolutely hidden in being known only to God. Only Christ knows his own. Roman Catholics such as Grisar and Scheeben-Atberger had protested that this absolute invisibility destroyed the idea of community. Rietschel had restricted the absoluteness to unbelievers. But Althaus argued that for Luther the church was a completely spiritual reality unexperientiable and needing signs of its existence in Word and Sacrament. And yet there was no tension between this hiddenness and the reality of community.

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<sup>1</sup> "Communio Sanctorum", see above p 21

<sup>2</sup> The dependence of Luther's conception of love and community upon his Theologia Crucis served, said Althaus, to purify it of non-New Testament elements, and to restore it to its New Testament character except in one respect: The element of love and community based on the joy of creation is lacking. Not all joy in another is Eros. cf I Corinthians 12,26 (op cit, 83)

How then does community exist when one does not know whether the other belongs to the church? Luther would answer, said Althaus, that it is the love of God in his Word, coming through the other, that binds us into a community. The Word has its effect without any previous certainty of the one that the other really believes it. And it forms the ground of the human love and community, not vice versa.

This emphasis on the Word, said Althaus, made it impossible for Luther to turn aside into the impossible task of separating believers from apparent believers in the church. The conception of the invisible church was rather the polemical means of differentiating the church of God from the usurping perversions of men. Nor did this church become a mere solipsism. He accepted his own congregation as belonging to the church, and he revered men like Augustine and Bernard as members of the church also. But his faith was reserved for the Word that continually called forth the church. There was no certainty as to whether others or even a person himself really believed but there was certainty in Whom a person believed.

John McNeill, in 1930,<sup>1</sup> saw the invisibility of the church for Luther and Calvin as part of the "unitive principle" of Protestantism by which it resisted the disintegrative forces of the day. Luther's conception was not speculative but was concerned directly with the socio-ethical aspects of Christian communion. Against Rade, McNeill asserted that Luther's conception of the communio sanctorum was dynamically social and communal. It was designed "to arouse a demand for the realization of ideal conditions of communion in the visible body. The idea functioned in the cause of practical church reform". The external communion, on the other hand, was "the bearer into routine social living of the values of the communio sanctorum".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See above p 131

<sup>2</sup> Unitive Protestantism, 39-41



For Calvin also the invisibility of the church was active and dynamic, but was conceived somewhat differently. It was a result of sin and disobedience and a sign of misfortune. When the church was visibly deformed or devastated, it became concealed (in latebris). Invisibility was the result of the deforming of what should be in true openness. The task was therefore to restore the invisible to visibility. And the line where invisibility passed into visibility was, as with Luther, the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. There, the facies of the church became apparent. Calvin's conception like Luther's was, thus, an integrating social force.

For Lecerf, writing a little before this,<sup>1</sup> Calvin's conception of the invisibility of the church was the refuge of the faithful individual against a tyrannous visible order. The antithetical distinction of visibility and invisibility was further required because the underlying Biblical basis precluded any synthetic construction. Only in the mystical Body of Christ were the antitheses grounded in the same reality and truth. Lecerf found Calvin's Biblical ground for the distinction in the difference between the covenant with Christ and that with Abraham. The promise to Abraham is universal, but that with Christ extends to those elected as the supreme effort of divine love before the exigencies of divine holiness. The church in its invisibility is the limit of gratuitous election in face of the invincible resistance of the sinful will of man. It is the ideal church made in the election covenant with Christ, realised through the word and sacraments. The visibility of the church is wider than its invisible sphere, yet the church is the same: the body whose Head is Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Lecerf, "La doctrine de l'Eglise dans Calvin" (1929), in Etudes Calvinistes, Paris, Delachaux et Niestlé, 1949



Jacob, in 1934,<sup>1</sup> provided a striking interpretation of Luther's conception in its dynamic and historical aspects. For Luther, he said, the church is invisible as the group of those in bondage to the Word in the "Kontrasituation" of this world. This invisibility arises because of the conflict between the Word and Satan, a conflict which is carried on within the narrow confines of the human heart, and across the wide field of world history. In this conflict the victory of the Word is hidden eschatologically under the form of the Cross. And the dynamic activity of the Word in calling men forth from their encirclement by Satan in praesumptio and desperatio, always provokes the counter-attack of Satan in endeavouring to bring about through Anfechtung the church's abandonment of the paradox of forgiveness and sanctitas passiva.

Luther, said Jacob, thought of visibility not as that of a geographically defined community, but as that of the signs, Word and Sacrament. These are the means whereby those adhering to the Word obtain consolatio in time of Anfechtung and destructio of the power of the Adversary. In with and under Word and Sacrament God reveals his victory over Satan. And against these visible signs Satan concentrates his attack. He endeavours to pervert their character into a construct arising from within the sphere of the humanum, instead of radically from without. He endeavours to replace justification and forgiveness by justitia personalis and sanctitas activa. Hence Luther's insistence upon pura doctrina.

Thus seen, Jacob declared, the problem of Luther's conception of the invisible and visible church is easily solved. The term invisibilis was an inadequate Neoplatonic borrowing that Luther used all his life. But his meaning was far removed from anything resembling a civitas platonica. It rather referred to the group of those adhering to the Word in the Kontra-situation. It described the justified in their appearance before the world. They are the church of Abel, sub contraria, similar to the form of the Word's appearance in the world,

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<sup>1</sup> G. Jacob, "Luthers Kirchenbegriff", in Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, vol 15 (1934), no 1

and in the hiddenness of the Incarnation. Visibility applied to the open historical signs. The church visible and invisible was locked inextricably, in history and in each individual, with the counter-group under the power of Satan.

As the hidden church of the justified, the invisible church was known only to faith. It was against all sensus and experientia. Not video but credo ecclesiam. The church stood ever on the narrow media via between the praesumptio of self-righteousness, and the desperatio diabolica; on the Word, on forgiveness, and in "invisibility" under the Cross.

Parallel to the bringing of Luther's conception of the invisible church into connection with his theologia crucis<sup>1</sup> went the re-interpretation of Calvin's conception. Bohatec<sup>1</sup> in particular undertook its rehabilitation from the point of view of the "organismic" idea. The real church - the invisible church - he said, was a dynamic spiritual organism comprising all the elect including angels, under the headship of Christ. Calvin brought election into a necessary relation with community. The corpus Christi mysticum was a reality not an idea. Its ground was beyond itself in the electing grace of God. The act of election preceded incorporation into the Body of Christ, but incorporation was a necessary consequence of election. Christ formed the head of the Body and ensured its unity through the dynamic operation of his Spirit. As such the real church was a living spiritual reality identifiable with the Kingdom of God, transcending time and space, joining earth with heaven, yet distinct from God's general overlordship in the world. Contrary to Sohm's interpretation, Calvin's idea was by no means less "pure" than Luther's, which, Bohatec found to be essentially the same.

Because of the dynamic character of this organic spiritual community it was always pressing towards self-manifestation in the world (communicatio). The timeless mystical unity took shape in concrete communities. Here the members shared

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<sup>1</sup> See above p 37

with one another in a common life according to individual capacity. There is no contradiction here, Bohatec found, between the organic idea and the teaching on election. Contrary to the views of Seeberg and others, Calvin did not relegate the church to a secondary position. For the elect, sanctification takes place only in the community of the church.

It follows therefore, said Bohatec, that Calvin's view of the church as a dynamic organism overcomes any unjustified setting of the invisible against the visible church. Scripture speaks of the church in a twofold way - from the divine and the human point of view. But by this is not meant two communities with different constituencies. The invisible church is aliquatenus visible in the historical societas. By a judgment of love we number all as members who confess Christ and participate in the church. Where the sacraments and Word are, there is the facies of the church, and there the invisible church is present in the externa societas. The means of grace are never without fruit. Therefore the visible church is also the object of faith. In all this careful delineation, said Bohatec, Calvin neither over nor under estimated the effect of the Gospel.

Bohatec differed radically from the interpretation of Sohm. He denied that Calvin catholicised the pure conception of Luther, and asserted on the contrary that both stand together in valuing the visible form of the church while holding that the true church can exist "ohn den Leip" of external Christendom. Calvin's distinction between the externa ecclesia and the vera ecclesia proves, said Bohatec, that he has not re-introduced catholicism. His concern was to oppose, in general Reformation style, the Formchristen without depreciating the visible church. Nor, added Bohatec, does Calvin's constitution of the congregation form a departure from the New Testament view, as Sohm represents it. Both Luther and Calvin interpreted Matthew 18<sup>20</sup> practically as applying to the individual congregation. They freely acknowledged both informal and formal gatherings around the Word as the church, but both naturally place more stress on the whole congregation than on the "two or three". Bohatec concluded that neither Calvin nor

Luther could have any sympathy with Sohm's thoroughgoing attempt to place the conception of the church over against all constitutional forms.

In the approach of Niesel<sup>1</sup> also there is discernable a shift of emphasis compared with earlier interpreters. To Niesel, Calvin's teaching on the church is concerned with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ not the definition of the nature of a religious community. God wishes to call us into union with Christ. He therefore entrusts the Gospel to the church not so as to give it a power of disposal but in such a way that God remains Lord over the Gospel and through the Gospel. He reveals himself through the church's proclamation but he is not bound to it. But for us as sinners the church the Mother of Believers, is unconditionally the place where we expect to meet with Christ. In this meeting we are drawn into his Body, an organic community. But Christ always remains the head. The rest of us are servants. Hence constitutional powers are given only providing that his authority is maintained without any infringement. For infringements disturb the innermost nature of the church as belonging to Christ. To Calvin therefore the ordering and rule of the church proceed directly out of its nature as the Body of Christ, because false leadership could tear the Body away from its Head. The form of the church's ordering, far from standing apart from and in contradiction to its nature (Sohm), concerns our relationship to Christ as sole Lord. The grounding of the church on election reinforces this point. It ensures God's sovereignty over it and the sole glorification of Christ. Election deprives the church of all extraneous support, places it under the control of God, and prepares it thus to carry out its task in the world.

Only when the church is the mother of all believers is the "Augustinian" distinction of the visible and invisible church appropriate. Calvin does not desire to withdraw the

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Niesel, Die Theologie Calvins, München, Chr. Kaiser, 1938



visible church from the sphere of Christ's lordship, but to preserve it within that sphere. But the church in its totality is God's affair. To it belong those who are dead, and those who are not yet born. Some of us in the church, moreover, do not really belong to it. How can we judge what the church is therefore?

The invisibility of the church, argued Niesel, means that God remains Lord of the church; and that the Body of Christ never coincides with the church-community in which we live. The conception of the invisible church safeguards this idea; it is a critical vantage point, not something that serves to develop two churches. There is always a gap between the church in which we live and the Body of Christ even though our church is that from which we can never separate without denying Christ.

<sup>h</sup> Kolfaus, the following year (1939),<sup>1</sup> made an exhaustive exegesis of the idea of the Christ-community (Christus-gemeinschaft) in Calvin's writings. He stressed the fact that whether Calvin referred to the church in its invisibility or visibility, he always understood Christ to be its head and the church his body. Calvin, said Kolfaus, thought of both aspects together, and the reality of the Christusgemeinschaft prevented any tearing apart of the two sides. He thought, moreover, not of men joining themselves to this community, but of Christ's incorporation of them into his own community. This was no abstraction, for Calvin was constantly aware of the danger in which French and German evangelicals stood, and felt part with them in the one Christusgemeinschaft.

In a work published in 1939, also, Hans Asmussen<sup>2</sup> gave voice to a general feeling of the danger of the Reformers' conception of the church's invisibility. Asmussen refused to consider Luther's conception, preferring Gerhard, Luther's great

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<sup>1</sup> See above p 140

<sup>2</sup> Hans Asmussen, Die Kirche und das Amt, München, Chr. Kaiser, 1939



orthodox systematiser, as the simpler exponent of the Lutheran position. Asmussen is an avowed Lutheran, but he is equally critical of both the Lutheran and the Reformed conceptions.

Gerhard and Calvin, he said, were obsessed by the distinction of the invisible and visible church. To them the individual believer with the other elect constituted the invisible church. They insisted on the unity of the church, but in effect this new conception broke up all unity based on the Roman imperium and faith was carried back to the personal realm. But the distinction was never grounded securely on a Biblical proof. It remained, what it was, a polemic against Rome based on the point that many hear the Word but some, perhaps many, are not Christians. Today, however, said Asmussen, few would wish to press this point. The New Testament knows the problem of hypocrites but it is peripheral. Yet precisely this peripheral point becomes central to Gerhard and Calvin. And this departure from the New Testament has had disastrous consequences in Protestantism.

The New Testament is interested rather in the revelation of God to Christians and to non-Christians, and in the church as involved in this. The church as revealing God in the world is the problem of the church's visibility not the admixture of hypocrites. Gerhard's position is entirely coloured by the anti-Roman polemic. He contrasts the true believers with the mere vocati who partake externally of the sacraments. But the visibility of the church is derived from the visibility of these sacraments, and this produces an inner uncertainty in his conception of the church. For Calvin on the other hand the church is an "external" means of help. This hardly squares with the church as the final koinonia with Christ, as the Third Article, and with 1 John 3<sup>1</sup>. Both men tend to isolate the doctrine of election and to base the church on it; whereas in the New Testament there is no such endeavour. It knows no distinction between the church apparent to the eyes of men, and the "invisible true church, seen only by God".

Furthermore, both men possess a narrower point of view regarding this true church. Today, said Asmussen, we are faced

with having to examine signs of the true church in various other churches, a task complicated by centuries of historical development. Moreover we are menaced today at the point of visibility, in a way the Reformers could not anticipate and in which they are unable to help us. Both in starting point and in emphasis, the New Testament is closer to our needs. We do wrong therefore to narrow our view of the church to that of Luther and Calvin. The basis of their unbiblical distinction between the invisible and visible church, concluded Asmussen, lies in their inadequate appreciation of the revelational character of the church. Thus e.g., Pentecost was an event of a revelational character. Peter pointed to it as a sign of the last time. In this the church was involved, and men in their gathering together had a part in it. The event began the pouring out of God's Spirit in the salvation of the world. It called forth the witness of the believers. But significantly enough, there is through it all absolutely no reference to the church as visible and invisible.

Törnwall's work, published in Sweden in 1940, and translated into German in 1947,<sup>1</sup> provokes the question as to whether Luther had a conception of the church at all. Writing on the two "Regimente", he appears to absorb the notion of the church so fully into that of the geistliche Regiment that the conception of the church loses its identity. Admittedly Törnwall is concerned to correct a one-sidedness in Lutheranism: of centering the interest too exclusively on the geistliche Regiment. He stressed that God rules the world through Word and Obrigkeit. His rule is thus immediately and concretely present in the whole of spiritual and material life. Törnwall also subsumed the teaching on the Regimente under God's majesty as Creator. In the weltliche Regiment God rules through the larva of the created world; in the geistliche Regiment, however, he rules by the preached Word over a Hörreich. In insisting upon the unity of the two regiments under

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<sup>1</sup> Geistliches und weltliches Regiment bei Luther, München, Chr. Kaiser, 1947

the rule of the Creator, Törnwall rejects all spiritualisation of the Divine revelation and activity. The Gospel is thus related to creation and is not merely for the inner spiritual life.

In this context, Törnwall discusses the interpretation of Luther's conception of the church. The difficulty in relating the communion of saints to the outward form of the church is due, said Törnwall, to the dominance of a spiritualistic interpretation of the conception of the church. The spiritualising approach saw in Luther's conception, the formation of a "geistig" community in reaction to the external and legal institution of Rome. "Instead of a divine Regiment or preaching office, the conception of the invisible church, conceived as a spiritual relation between the individual and Christ, is introduced."<sup>1</sup> This idea is individualistic and spiritualistic. Luther, said Törnwall, spoke on the contrary of the Kingdom of God, the Church and the Gospel as a single inseparable unity: the geistliche Regiment. Nor was the central point in man himself. It was a rule over man by God. Man's part was to hear. God speaks and man is drawn out of his isolation into a divine relation.

Törnwall criticises both the positions of Sohm (the Regimente unified under the mediaeval corpus Christianum), and Holl (the Regimente divided and left without organic relation). With both the basis in the idea of Creation is lacking, as is the corollary that both together form the whole of God's revelation. The geistliche Regiment as divine revelation is first of all God's full revelation (regnum dei invisibile) and only derivatively an institution. Törnwall draws up a diagramme to illustrate the form of God's revelation and rule in the two Regimente: First from the Regnum dei invisibile God's revelation becomes, within the world, the geistliche Regiment, to which a number of terms refer including regnum dei, regnum fidei, Reich Gottes, Ecclesia, Verbum Creatum, Das Wort, Evangelium, Regiment Christi, Christlich Reich, Christlich Regiment, Predigtamt, Hörreich.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 26

Then, it becomes institutionalised as ecclesia, Regiment Christi, Reich Gottes, Euangelium, and geistliches Regiment. The geistliche Regiment is the creator present in his created world. But it is not a higher sphere (against Holl) - both regiments are held together as the rule of the creator (direct and indirect respectively). The characteristic of the geistliche Regiment is that man hears and obeys. In this form it covers the whole of life. In the weltliche Regiment (based on Gen 1<sup>28</sup>) man exercises authority as cooperator dei and all grades of authority, reason and law are included. But the geistliche Regiment is only a Hörreich. The error of the Papacy was to confound the two, and thus to evolve a form of the church in contradiction to its nature. This form is the Predigtamt, founded by Christ, and a unique instrument of God's direct presence and action. This sets the institutional pattern to the geistliche Regiment, and avoids any spiritualising. The conception of the church, said Törnwall, is an indissoluble whole (unauflösliche Ganzheit). Hence, there is no problem of an inner nature and an outer form: the church is held under the geistliche Regiment which stands with the weltliche Regiment as an integral part of Creation and Revelation. Luther opposed both Rome and the Anabaptists for mixing what God has ordained to be separate. This mixing of geistlich and weltlich issues in their misuse and possession by the Devil. They are, therefore, never neutral, but either under God, or against Him.

The last work in the survey is the interpretation of E. Seeberg, conveniently summarised in his small handbook on Luther's theology.<sup>1</sup> Seeberg insisted that the conception of the church is a theological not a sociological one in Luther. Hence it is above all of an institution. As a human association (Genossenschaft) the church is purely a larva. Its members too are larvae. Hence, Luther had no interest in predestination as a constitutive element. The church is incarnate but does

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<sup>1</sup> Luthers Theologie in ihren Grundzügen, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1950



not consist of flesh and blood. It is a direct derivative of Christ. As Christ is hidden in the Cross, and yet precisely there reveals God, so the church is hidden in opposition to the world, and under the false church. The Papacy was seen by Luther as falling away from the true church of which persecuted witnesses continued to be present as the true succession of believers. Seeberg found that the sociological conception of the church in Luther was not lacking. It proceeded from the institutional.<sup>1</sup> As the recipients of God's grace, men become priests to their neighbours. The institution creates the Gemeinde. The distinction for E. Seeberg was, therefore, not invisibility/visibility, but institution/congregation (Gemeinde). The established church (Volkskirche), must therefore be thought of as including both the confessional church (Bekennniskirche) and the gathered congregations (ecclesiolae in ecclesia).

In these interpretations may be seen a progressive discarding of the term ecclesia invisibilis as central for Luther's and Calvin's conception of the church. The tendency has been to paraphrase the term, and the visible-invisible church distinction, and to place them in different contexts in order to bring out the fullness of the Reformers' understanding of the invisibility and visibility of the church. Ritschl, for example, substituted three different categories, Krauss replaced the invisible church by another conception altogether. Sohm resolved the distinction by abolishing the visible form. Rietschel made the visibility and invisibility strictly coincident. Much useful study is devoted to comparing the ideas of the two Reformers, and to tracing their origins and developments. More recently the invisibility of the church is considered more and more in subordination to other aspects of Luther's and Calvin's thought: to justification, to the church as community, or as institution, to the struggle between the

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<sup>1</sup> cf "Der soziologische Kirchenbegriff beruht bei Luther eben doch auf dem institutionellen" (Theologie II, 442)



Word and Satan, to the organic idea of the Body of Christ, or the Christ-community, to the church as geistliches Regiment, to the gap between Christ as Lord of his church and the church in which we live, or to the polemic against Rome, and nominal Christianity. The invisibility of the church for Luther and Calvin has ceased, by common consent, to be considered under the neoplatonic term ecclesia invisibilis, and now must be considered in the context of the fullness of their thought.